

The Social Media Effect on the Families of the Saudi Society from the Perspective of the  
Youth

by

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## ABSTRACT

This social media network (SMN) study regarding youth of Saudi Arabia, focused on the effect of the SMN on youth with their families and their traditions. The significance of this study is to have an understanding of the effect of the SMN on the youths' families. Furthermore, recommendations were given from the perspective of the youth to help improve Saudi Arabian society using SMN. A total of 617 students from University of Dammam, ages from 18-24, have participated in the survey. The results of the survey showed that despite some potential effect of the SMN on the youth and their relations with their families, these are also resilient in many aspects. However, the outcome of involvement with the SMN is obvious on other aspects as well, such as the gained ability of self-decision making and the ability to accept opposing opinions. Moreover, the research findings specific to women indicate that they are more active in the SMNs. The results also demonstrate women gained knowledge of their rights and gained freedom of speech. Finally, the findings led to a conclusion that there is potential social change in the Saudi Arabian society, even though the family structure is not changing significantly.

For my precious mother.

For my wonderful wife.

Without God's blessing then your support, your prayers, and your love,

The completion of this work would not have been possible.

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# **CHAPTER 1**

## **Introduction**

With the information revolution and the dominance of electronic communication, the countries involved with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), which are Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, UAE, and Oman, moved from farming communities and societies, which depended on the generosity of land and sea, to the modern entities in terms of interaction and transmission of information through current and up to date means of communication.

Saudi Arabia, like many other countries, has undergone a great deal of transformation, from sustaining a simple and vast desert country to becoming a powerful, wealthy, and famous country in the Middle East. This change has been occurring over the last half century. In the 1950's, the country was believed to have no natural resources of its own. However, this belief only remained until the massive discovery of great oil deposits, which turned the economic status of the country immediately for the best. Moving within union with this economic achievement are the changes to the structure and government of Saudi Arabia in terms of the political, health, social, and educational elements of the country. The sudden rush of modernization in the lifestyle of the Saudis affects the lives of the people as they are divided into two terms. The first group can be divided into people who are willing to adapt to change, because they believe that Saudi Arabia should keep pace with modern world by allowing the entrance of new technologies to the country. The second group of people is the ones who are advocates of the past; because they think that any major changes in the country

will affect people's beliefs and the traditions of the Saudi family. Such a dilemma touches the new generation. This research will study the possible changes on the social systems in order to know the society's abilities to adapt changes.

With notable features and focus on wealth in terms of economic and historical components, it is significant to review whether Saudi Arabia is open for change and modification, especially in terms of free communication and adaptability to the ever changing social interactions both internationally and domestically.

Saudi Arabia's customs and traditions limit interaction and communication both within its society and of its society, particularly from the young people's interaction with social issues, since resolutions to these issues are often left to the elders. The strict implementation and application of cultural beliefs and customs prohibit many to openly express interactions with each other. Yet, the GCC countries, particularly Saudi Arabia, have been open to the use of a popular new communication style, social media. Social Media Such as Facebook, Twitter, and Blogs are web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site. (Boyd, 2007). It is notable that Saudi Arabia together with the GCC countries has opened their societies to new investors, technological developments, and new techniques for

privatization and exploring the most powerful element of trade and globalization  
– social media interaction.

### **The Purpose of the Study**

This research study aims to study the influence of social media on the Saudi society. If it was shown that the social media has an effect on the Saudi society, the results of this study might help other researchers or decision makers in Saudi Arabia regarding how to use the social media to create projects to improve the Saudi society.

### **Research Problem**

In order to assess the particular effects of social media on Saudi Arabian society, the researcher seeks to find the impact of social media on the youth and the customs and traditions of their families. Therefore, this research is going to answer the following research questions:

1. Are there social impacts of social media on the youth of Saudi Arabia specific to customs/traditions?
2. Have the young people in Saudi Arabia become more liberal from the family's traditions because of the social media?

### **Background of the Study**

The GCC countries are located in the Arabian Peninsula in the Middle East. The Arabian Peninsula, as the world's largest peninsula, is bounded by several countries, which contain different and various political statuses. The desert is the most prominent feature of the peninsula and is shared by the countries within the Arabian Peninsula. Yet the desert is not only the element

shared by these countries; the Arabian Peninsula is connected additionally through the Islamic faith with similar customs and traditions particularly through the political and religious facets of the society. In the era preceding the technology revolution, the social systems in these countries were very basic regarding information transition. They were missing any kind of technology that could be used to spread local events and news. The only way known to obtain domestic and international news and distribute information was through the Addiwaniya, which denotes a common public place for men or a house for women who live in the same area to meet each other a few hours daily whether they were neighbors or family members. Even though Addiwaniya was a social place to exchange news, it also was served as a primitive parliament to discuss the local issues and make the needed decisions.

Saudi Arabia occupies most of the Arabian Peninsula; the country is bounded by bodies of water such as the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aqaba, and the Persian Gulf, or as known in the Middle East, the “Arabian Gulf”. Since 1933, Saudi Arabia has become the leading supplier of the global oil industry, has the largest economy in the Middle East, and is located at the center of the continent, strategically located along major international business lines through shipping routes. It is advantageously located right in the center of several prosperous neighboring countries, namely Jordan, Iraq, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Yemen, Qatar and Bahrain. Due to this geographical location, Saudi Arabia has been a center of trade and commerce. Now, with the advent modern technological

communication, Saudi Arabia has marked the most users of social communications online within these gulf countries.

It is notable that Saudi Arabia is a socially closed country, yet it contains both modern buildings and ancient architecture. Saudi Arabia has been the seat of the Islamic faith for centuries. Even though modernity has surrounded it, the ancient traditions and practices have been sustained in respect to the Islamic faith. Thereby, for all the previous features of Saudi Arabia, it was chosen as the targeted sample of this area. Due to its notable features and focus on wealth, in terms of economic and historical components, it is significant to review whether Saudi Arabia society is open for change and modification especially in terms of free communication and adaptability to the ever changing social interactions domestically.

Along with the discovery of Saudis' wealth – the oil reserves simultaneously meant the introduction of television to the country. This technology has exposed the citizens to various outside foreign cultures, which the history of Saudi Arabia indicates caused a great fear and condemnation within the religious community. People who were perhaps both more conservative and religious also condemned the evolution of new technologies such as the satellites and camera phones. The television allowed the Saudi society to be aware and explore much of the Western culture. The religious people saw this exploration as a threat to the society, but the ruling family of Saudi Arabia insisted on the entrance of these technologies to the country.

Moreover, according to the book *New Media in the Muslim World*, Saudi Arabia was not only enveloped by the television revolution but by Internet revolution as well “Likewise, existing publications and commercial publishing expertise have been the initial base for Internet ventures in neighboring countries, and Internet cafes are popular at least partly for repackaging telecommunications service....” (Eickelman and Anderson, 2003)

According to J.E. Peterson, “a fundamental revolution” in the features and elements of Saudi Arabia involved a “transformation” of the kingdom from being a “traditional and tribe-dependent” country to a more active and open country connecting with the world and its neighboring countries (Peterson, 1991). However, it is still notable that despite the significant adoption of Saudi Arabia of current trends on communications and interactions through social media, there is still no “complete revolution” since “their roots are old and the legitimacy of their ruling families is based on their evolution from traditional relationships”. (Peterson, 1991)

With the powerful and accessible feature of the Internet, the Saudi society is again faced by another revolution that affects the many facets of Saudi society – the social media composed of Facebook, Twitter, blogs, YouTube and many others. Such social media allows international and domestic social interactions to bridge the gap between various cultures and exposing the people to other cultural traditions and globalization. With the social media revolution enveloping the entire Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, evident effects and modifications are imminent.

However, it is notable that such integration of social media to the society has various effects of every facet of the society. This paper shall discuss the overall effects of social media to very feature of the Saudi society – to the family and youth.

### **Research Objectives**

This research about the social effects of social media on the Saudi society aims to fulfill the following objectives:

1. To gather data and information concerning social media in Saudi Arabia.
2. To be able to gather information on the effects of social media to the Saudi society, particularly with its youth and their families with consideration of their customs and tradition.
3. To be able to distinguish the positive and negative effects of social media to the Saudi society.

### **Research Assumptions**

1. It was assumed that the chosen participants were representative of the specific targeted group.
  2. It was assumed that all answers were answered honestly and completely.
  3. It was assumed that data collection would be completed in four weeks.
- However, if the surveys were not turned in within the allotted time, a follow-up letter would be distributed to encourage 100% participation.

### **Research Limitations**

1. The data collected from surveys will be limited due to the time limitation.
2. Also, the willing to share information in a conservative society can be an obstacle.



## **CHAPTER 2**

### **Literature Review**

#### **Historical Background**

Saudi Arabia is the homeland of Arab peoples and the belief of Islam. Islam is the world's second largest religion. Prophet Muhammad founded Islam in the Arabian Peninsula, hence, it is significantly where Mecca and Medina – two of the most celebrated and holy lands of Islamic faith – are located. The first Islamic state was founded in 622, during the year of “hegira” or the Prophet Muhammad's migration from Mecca. Several conquerors and invaders successively attempted to control the entire Arabian Peninsula; however, in 1517 the power of the Ottoman Empire dominated the region and it was divided into distinct principalities in the middle of the eighteenth century.

In the year 1745, Muhammad bin Abdulwahab called for the purification and extensive reform of the Islamic faith to the Arabian Peninsula. In 1811, the Muhammad bin Abdulwahab group succeeded in their turf and result to the union of the distinct forms of Islam present at that time. However, the power and control of the “Wahhabi” did not last as they were driven out by the collaboration of the Ottomans and the Egyptians.

Saudi Arabia is under absolute monarchy, thus political parties, labor unions and various professional organizations are prohibited. Legislation is prepared through royal decrees and most of them are paralleled with the Islamic law. The King formulates significant decisions with agreement of the Saudi royal family and the approval of the Prime Minister. Also, the king consults the

“*Ulama*”, or the elder religious leaders, and the "Shura Council." However, he does not need their approval. The Quran provides the country's ultimate constitution. Criminal cases are tried according to the *Sharia* or the Islamic Law that is sacred to the followers of Islam.

In 1992 the royal family introduced the constitution – Saudi Arabia's first ever. The legal system has always been based on Islamic law called “sharia”.

As an Islamic country especially bound by Islamic law, Saudi men enjoy more rights and privilege than the Saudi women. Women are not allowed to drive and cannot go overseas or study abroad without the permission of a male. Women are dependent on their fathers, brother or husbands who conduct businesses. As a form of submission, women have to constantly wear a veil when out in the public. But women also have the right to own a business and invest their property. They are viewed with respect especially if they have been mothers.

Today, a numerous number of Saudi women have been enjoying a high status in the family particularly with their roles as mothers or sisters. Also, many Saudi women have been sent abroad to study and they have been successful in academia. Saudi women have been known to be successful in literature and business. However, these successes have not been recognized by the public as they are barred from most of the aspects of public life.

Saudi Arabia, as an Islamic country, is known for its conservativeness and religious traditions. Islam is the key element that molds the cultural developments and foundations of the region as well as the norms, values, and attitudes of its followers. One of the most notable elements of this faith that overpoweringly

influence every facet of public and social life in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is the issue of the segregation of sexes – which is physically, socially and psychologically maintained in every feature of the society. This norm includes the principle that women are not allowed to deal with unrelated men – such ruling is applied to the workplace, public utilities and facilities such as the public transportation, schools, libraries and other public places.

"The practice of segregation and confining women to their own company is an institutional mechanism designed to regulate women", to guard their chastity and to "prevent other men from encroaching on the male honor of the family" (Almunajjed, 1997).

Human inventiveness as well as the continuing progress of technology develops interdependent relationship which results in many influences on society. These influences on society may either be in the form of positive effects or in negative ones. One of the most discussed topics nowadays that has relation to technology and its effects to humankind is the social media. And this statement is indeed true due to the growing and spread of the Internet through mobile phones, wireless Internet location as well as high speed Internet all over the world. In Saudi Arabia particularly, internet users have increased 19 times in the last 10 years while mobile cellular subscribers increased almost 50 times (ITU.org, 2010). This allowed the improvement of Internet devices that have now incorporated and a necessity for all people's life.

With the increasing patronization of social media in Saudi Arabia, the Saudis – with all the limitations of sex segregation and political silence – are

enabled to communicate and express their sentiments in online communities that are not possible before. Even if they are physically segregated and separated due to the norms of the faith and the community practices, they are united as they overcome this gender separation and political silence through the incorporation of the social media.

In relation to the Internet usage of Saudi Arabian citizens as well as their utilization of social media, Nadav Samin (2008) concluded in his study that Saudi Arabia utilizes their Internet and the web in so many aspects of the country. Internet is being used as a form of communication, news bulletin boards, an effective way of monitoring the economy and financial aspects of the country and much more. Now, Saudi Arabia has become one of the most active producers of Internet content in the Middle East (Nadav Samin, 2008).

Saudi Arabia government publicly started the use of internet in the year 1999. According to the author, the Arab internet users were over 200, 000 and by year 2006, it skyrocketed to 2,540,000 internet users (Nadav Samin, 2008). The government of Saudi has been encouraging its citizens to use the Internet and facilitates the use of it as well because they know that it provides the country many benefits, not only to improve the citizens' awareness and knowledge to technology but it also make the country itself globally competitive.

### **The Social Media**

Social media or what some people refer to as “social networking” is at its utmost today in all parts of the world because of the continuously development of new technologies, especially computers as well as due to the non-stop searching

of humans for easier and faster means of living. Social media functions significantly to all countries such as Korea, which is known for the most numbered Internet users worldwide, Indonesia, the country with the second largest population in Facebook, one of the social networking sites, USA and Japan which are the competing countries in terms of technology and Saudi Arabia, which is the main concern of this paper.

Social media has become a daily habit for people around the world. It is described by many as a website where people could put up their personal information, make use of it as a means of conversation, way to propagate globalization, interaction and participation of different people in different countries around the globe, and the like. Social media, unlike the newspaper, radio programs and television, is focused on sharing personal details, thoughts and information connecting millions of people around the globe. The popular social media tools are Facebook., Twitter, Formsspring, YouTube, Flickr, and Blogs which facilitate faster creation and exchange of personal ideas and details more than any conventional and traditional media. The social media can be defined in many different ways, one of which is “any Internet or mobile-based technology that promotes social interaction and sharing of user-generated content. It includes blogs and microblogs such as Twitter, social networking sites including Facebook and video sharing sites like YouTube.” (Al-Jassem, 2010)

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century era was filled with the advanced methods of communication enveloped with faster delivery, accessibility and reliability. People around the world communicate through the use of various techniques that

are cost and time efficient. One of these methods is through the use of social media which are delivered and utilized through the Internet – the most powerful and influential tool of the new millennium. Saudi Arabia, like any other country, is not alienated from the modernized and powerful method of communication connecting people from around the world called - the social media.

Many scholars are very careful with the use of the term “revolution” in dealing with socio-technical change. According Howard, describing the effect of Information and Communications Technologies in some countries may not be a “misnomer” because in some Muslim countries, democratic would barely exist without the internet (Howard, 2010).

According to media source, a “social media revolution” is occurring in Saudi Arabia. There at least ten million natives of Saudi Arabia that are online, three million have accounts on Facebook and 400% of which posts on Twitter. (Amos, 2011) Moreover, the SocialBakers.Com which provides reliable social media statistics posted the massive of growth of Facebook users in the country and it was reported that Facebook penetration in Saudi Arabia is 16.15% compared to the country's population and 42.40% in relation to the number of Internet users. The total number of Facebook users is reaching 4,154,860 and grew by more than 658,330 in the last 6 months which is a massive growth for the country. Comparing these Facebook statistics with the nearest countries by number of Facebook users shows that Saudi Arabia has 0.82% higher Facebook penetration than Guyana and 0.29% lower FB penetration than Fiji. (SocialBakers.Com)

Statistics show how many people in Saudi Arabia are using the social media for interacting with the people around the world. This section shall review and discuss some related literature that tackles social media and the society of Saudi Arabia with a focus on the effects of social media to the people of Saudi Arabia.

With the start of the social media hype, the people of Saudi Arabia together with the people of the world have utilized its modernized tools to express their opinions and thoughts whether civic or political. According to the Arab Social Media Report of January 2011, “The past year has seen social media being used in a wide variety of ways in the Arab region, whether to rally people around social causes and political campaigns, boost citizen journalism and civic participation, create a forum for debate and interaction between governments and their communities, or to enhance innovation and collaboration within government.” (Arab Social Media Report, 2011)

Thus, the use of social media has created an environment in which people are not just interacting or communicating with regards to personal conversations but is also being used to promote political views toward their government.

The graph below shows the statistical growth of the number of Facebook users in the Arab region as of December 2010 according to the Arab Social Media Report.

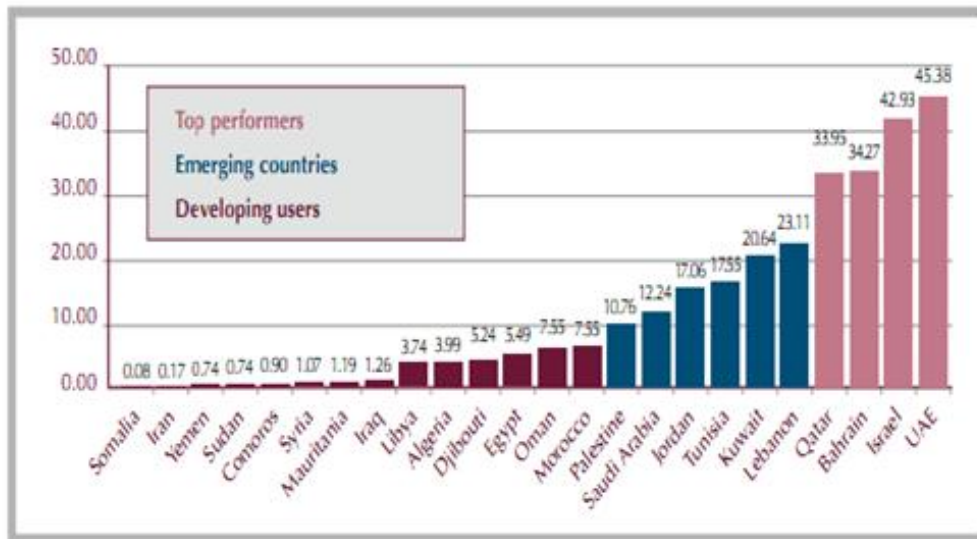


Figure 1. Facebook User Penetration in the Arab Region plus Iran and Israel

Source: Arab Social Media Report (Dec. 2010)

<http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents>

With regards to the fact that Facebook is the most popular social media form today, Grimmelmann, J. (2009), made an article that tackles the issue on saving or abolishing Facebook in the Internet websites. He included in his article several advantages and disadvantages of it to the society. His investigation regarding Facebook is true to all countries and not only in Saudi Arabia. Grimmelmann, J. (2009) defined Facebook as a social network site or web-based services which allow people to construct a profile with a bounded system in a public or semi-public type, communicate or share information, ideas, thoughts and the like to other users of this networking site, and lastly, view and navigate those other user's profile.

According to what he has written, Facebook can be helpful as well as detrimental to the ones using it. There are several negative results of having a Facebook account, such as privacy risks. Also, users do not necessarily read



Facebook policies when signing up; therefore, this could affect their behavior. Last but not least, there is no “ownership” in Facebook since the ownership is given to anyone who posts ideas or writes information.

Whereas, there are some of the positive effects or the benefits that people could get from Facebook. First of all, not everything posted on Facebook is public. For example, “unpredictable changes are dangerous. Changes that pull the rug out from under users’ expectations about privacy should be considered unfair trade practices” (Grimmelmann, 2009).

### **Positive Effects of Social Media**

According to Alsaggaf, social media has significant effects to the population of Saudi Arabia. A radical transformation” is occurring in Saudi Arabia. The internet has made heavy and lasting influence on the social culture as well as public thinking. The study cited some positive effects brought about by social media. One of which is that Saudis have become more open-minded. According to Samy, a male respondent said that online community has helped him to learn to accept the views of other people saying that: *I learned something that is very important and that is for everyone a point of view that must be respected. And it is a must that I listen to it and discuss it without forcing my ideas.*

In addition, females have become more open-minded and more “aware of the wider characteristics of men within their society” because of the social media. A female respondent said that: (Al-Saggaf, 2004) the forum (on social media) made me listen to both sides of the views. And respect all views. Before I used to

see only my views as right and reject any other views. Today I listen to all views with an open heart.

The study proved that social media has made the Saudi individuals to “challenge different ideas” and create an environment in which they can exchange “intellectual discussions’. He mentioned that Saudis have become more aware. One of the respondents of the study said that prior to social media utilization she “used to think that people were naïve” but because of the social media she “learned that people are different types”. Saudis have become “less inhibited and more appreciative” of the opposite sex. Continuous conversations between male and female through the social media makes Saudis become “less inhibited about each other.” Concerns and social problems discussed on social media make both genders feel appreciative of one another (Al-Saggaf, 2004).

Alsaggaf mentioned in his study that Saudis “became more self-confident” after using social media. Hierarchy has a great significance in Saudi society, and older members of the community dominate face-to-face discussions. Therefore, younger individuals are always asked not to express themselves and their ideas. From childhood, they are reminded not to talk in the presence of elders. This results in making them grow up with the lack of confidence in themselves. Using the internet, however, allows them to express themselves and stand up for their ideas in front of others. Now, it has become more socially acceptable to say “this is my point of view, and we can agree to disagree” while in the past it was almost socially prohibited from a young person to say such a thing.

In the past, serious discussions can end up with the end of friendship, end of social relations, or even end with fights. Now, with the spread of social media and the ability of discuss different topics freely, Saudi people are adapting listening and understanding skills from the western world. Thereby, their discussions have many good aspects involved such as listening and respecting the others opinions and beliefs.

### **Negative Effects of Social Media**

The psychological and social effects of the social media have been studied by psychologists and psychiatrists over the years. People tend to seek genuine relationships virtually which is impossibility since real friends and actual human interaction cannot replace friendships shared online.

Excessive exposure to virtual relationship affect how the huge part of the Saudi youth treat their family relationships and their educational and career plans. Dr. Taghreed Al Samman, a Saudi social consultant argued that internet has made Saudis into introverts. Since the youngsters of the Saudi society do not have many options in terms of entertainment, the internet became a breath a fresh air. It opened a vast space for the youth, allowing them to live in an entirely new world and meet a bunch of new people. Aside from changing the social characteristics of the youth, the internet gave them immoral and extremist thoughts. This is due to the long hours spent in front of the computer screen which can brainwash the mind.

The internet has also become destructive to the marriages of many societies as it is easier to maintain casual relationships on social networking sites.

Studies show that many Saudis use the internet to get into immoral relationships. This was an extreme reaction from some youth because of the closed life style in which these young people were brought up.

The study on *The Effect of Online Community on Offline Community in Saudi Arabia* also conducted a survey on the negative effects of social media to the Saudi community. The study concluded that Saudis neglected their family commitments. The amount of time spent for family bonding, recreation and physical conversations were reduced because of social media. The study found out that the respondents' admitted that their online participation ate away the time they spent with their family and friends also taking away the time that should have been used for studying or reading. Moreover, "*taking into account that family ties and relationships with relatives, according to religion, are very important, participation in online forums could be a danger to the fabric if the family structure.*" (Al-Saggaf, 2004)

Another conclusion was that Saudis "became intellectually confused". Social media exposes the Saudis views and ideas that could be "against their cultural values". Influence on the belief and practices are widespread which makes some Saudis doubt of what they believe.

### **Effects of Social Media on the Youth of Saudi Arabia**

In addition to the opportunity of getting to know a lot of people in a speedy and trouble-free way, the social media has also facilitated teenagers to have societal or physical mobility boundaries to make and preserve relationships with their friends and families. Youths who went overseas in order to study can

still continue in meaningful contact with their parents and home town friends. Significantly, there are evidences of positive results from the utilization of technologies.

The modern world is enveloped by the social media and Facebook is taking over the world. Indeed Facebook has reached millions of people from all walks of life ranging from teenagers to older people. Teenagers have perfectly known the ways on how to utilize the social media to its extent. Nowadays, teenagers share information and views through the social media. According to the article written by Mona Eltaway (2008), the Internet, blogs, and social networking sites now give voices to those most marginalized in the Middle East today—“young people and women.” Positively, the social media has posted good results in some ways for the Saudi Arabia youth. This is particularly shown in the statement of Haifa Jamal Al-Lail, president of Effat University in Jeddah said that the Jeddah floods were considered the first event that proves the power of social media as it brought a number of volunteers together in order to effect positive change (Al-Jassem, 2010). In addition, people became more aware of what is happening in Jeddah because of the social media. Specifically, the social media has helped the youth’s awareness and concern to the society be brought together in times of calamities, and social media is helping the community to act.

Moreover, youth initiatives have utilized social media like Facebook and Twitter via modern devices like iPhone and BlackBerry, pointing the way forward to serve others and to achieve their community-oriented goals. For example, some college students established an Arabic Facebook page for those who need some

psychological or social advice, and they invited some certified doctors to be members and help the participants. The community is not yet accepting people to go the psychiatrics; therefore, this page was a good help. Also, social media was a great help for the police in several occasions in Saudi Arabia, such as finding missing people.

Women have become very active in the Saudi SMNs, specifically in blogs. They have a loud voice now that force the society to hear their opinions. For example, there is a woman called Wajeha Al-Huwaider started a women driving campaign and attracted international audiences. (Agarwal, Lim, & Wigand, 2012) her campaign is still going on via YouTube and her writings in several blogs even though she faced hard obstacles from the government.

Below is a graph taken from the Arab Social Report of 2010 which shows the overall youth population utilizing Facebook in the Arab regions:

Graph 3. Comparison of Overall Youth Population to Facebook Penetration Rates in Arab Countries

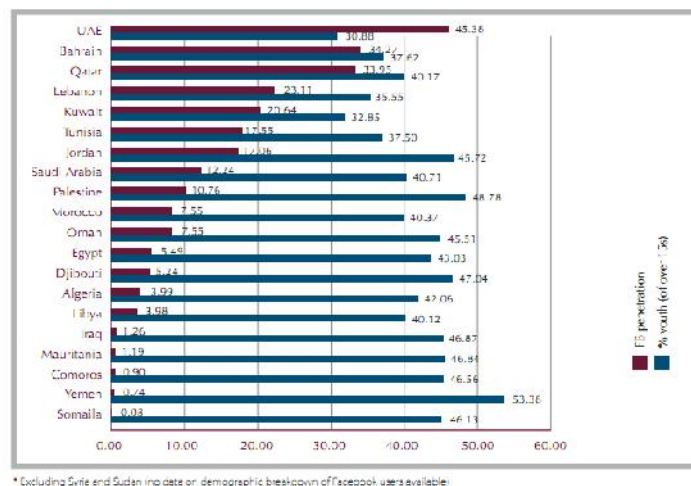


Figure 2. Overall Youth Population Utilizing Facebook in the Arab Region

*Source:* Arab Social Media Report <http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/document>

In addition, the Saudi Arabia youth through social media have their minds interconnected with the powerful call on political views expression and civic outcry. Also, the youth has been introduced to the Western culture that affects their opinions with regards to the government. It has been apparent that young people are having more freedom to discuss several issues using social media. However, this may create a gap between the gradually irreverent youth and the remainder of the population brought up to respect the wisdom of elders. The government should have an effort support the youth and minimize that gap. In AlMunajjed & Sabbagh study, 63% of the young participants think that they should have given an increased access to decision-making process and policy implementation at the local level, while 58% think that the government should create local youth councils for effective participation in society (AlMunajjed & Sabbagh, 2011).

### **Effects of Social Media on the Family in Saudi Arabia**

The Gulf societies have been undergoing radical changes since the end of the 1970s. The Arab Gulf family is passing through a fast transition that affects its functions, roles, and structure. The interactions between family members occur within the context of social relations set by values and norms of their culture and religion. Even though the family is changing to a nuclear family, it is characterized by extended relations. The Arab Gulf nuclear family is in a transitional stage that carries many features of both the Western model of nuclear family and the traditional extended family model (Alhaddad, 2003).

Rural-urban migration has played, and is still playing, a significant role in urban transformations in most Arab Gulf cities, and has significant impact on the nature and type of urban life (Alhaddad, 2003). Changes are also affecting the family and the individual in the context of the current urban transformation. The discovery of oil led to deep integration of Gulf society in the international capitalist market. That integration exposed Gulf society to the advent of ethnic, financial, technological, intellectual and ideological influences which led to radical changes in the social and economic life of society.

With the rise of internet and especially after the social media, family functions have been obviously changing. Some studies adopt a typical view of transition from traditional to modern values. Individuals have learned to speak up their opinion regardless what they have been raised on, such as respecting the older to the extreme of not discussing critical issues with them. Saudi Arabia is traditionally known for men population overseeing or over-empowering the women population. However, through the rise of the social media, women have started to go out of their ways to post their experiences and their views.

A woman named Manal Al-Sharif posted a video of herself driving her SUV; this is against the law in Saudi Arabia. The government arrested her and have her jailed for nine days. Such decision collected 30,000 massive comments on Twitter. One of the tweets, from a woman in Jiddah, says:

*“Are you accusing a woman of being a sinner because she went to jail for driving? What kind of religion would come up with that?”* (MacFarquhar, 2011)



Moreover, a Twitter enthusiast named Louai A. Koufiah, stated that: “*Saudis cannot go out to demonstrate, so they retweet!*” The report indicated how social media affect the Saudi tradition particularly on women. “Social media, which helped drive protests across the Arab world, seems tailor-made for Saudi Arabia, where public gatherings are illegal, women are strictly forbidden to mix with unrelated men and people seldom mingle outside their family.” (MacFarquhar, 2011)

What Manal Al-Sharif did was done again by several Saudi women and was covered socially by Facebook and Twitter. Moreover, the Saudi government faced a pressure from its young people to give women more rights. And because of the revelations that are happening the Middle East, the Saudi government felt that it has to respond to their requests. Therefore, the government did respond for some of these request such as giving women the right to elect and vote for the Shura Council even though, this faced a lot of rejection by the powerful religious men fearing that the traditional family roles would change.

A big issue in the Saudi society is that they mix traditions with religion. Therefore, some decisions are made in the name of Islam while these decisions have nothing to do with it; it is just a tradition. As a result, the Saudi society has been living in lots of contradictions. Now, these contradictions are reducing.

More and more Saudi women are using the social media such as Twitter, Facebook and Youtube that “have enabled the women to challenge the status quo more easily.” (Watson, 2011) The Dubai School of Government found out that the “percentage of women who used Facebook rose from 32% to 33.5% in the first three months of this year.”

## **Summery**

This part of the paper sums up the information gathered and mentioned on the effects of social media on the society of Saudi Arabia. It also distinguishes the significant positive and negative effects of social media to the citizens of Saudi Arabia and the country itself. However, further research is required to see the effect of the social media on the family and the youth and how it participated to change some of the norms and traditions is a society that is known to be a very conservative one. The literature showed us that there is an effect but not enough to know how deep and how spread is it. The next chapter will show the methodology the researcher will use to gather the needed information from the perspective of the youth.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **Methodology**

#### **Research Design**

This study is a quantitative research that aims to consolidate existing information and relevant data regarding the effects of social media such as Facebook and Twitter on the citizens of Saudi Arabia, especially the youth. The research involved investigation and experience with a particular phenomenon that is of the researcher's prime interest. The results of these methods delivered a detailed description of information gathered. This study wishes to depict the current effects of social media on the social behavior of the Saudi society. The researcher decided to utilize the quantitative method for information verification regarding the effects of social media to the different areas of Saudi community to have the awareness of the power and spread of the social media on the Saudi society, and thereby know the ability of such societies to accept new phenomena. Finally, surveys are used as the tool of collecting the data; also, statistical analysis was involved in this research.

#### **Data Collection**

This research employed both descriptive and exploratory research methods in the course of the study. Descriptive research is a technique incorporated to acquire data relating to the current effects of the technological development such as social media to one of the major countries of the Middle East – Saudi Arabia in this study. The current study is an investigative effort to gather information regarding the effects of social media to the Saudi society. The researcher utilized

existing literatures and studies in order to authenticate surveys as well as to come up with introductory ideas concerning the research problem.

This research made use of a general type of social research instrument which is surveys. Furthermore, University of Dammam was chosen for this study because of its size (one of the three largest universities in Saudi Arabia); also it attracts students from all regions of the country. Consequently, the university is a representative of the youth in the Saudi society.

A 22-question survey using the software Survey Monkey was sent to University of Dammam young Saudi citizens (18-24 years old) via email, the university's forums, Facebook pages, and twitter, hoping to get at least 375 completed surveys, which is the appropriate sample size since the university population is around 15,000 students and the used margin of error was 5%. In order to get a large number of college students, the survey was also sent thru the university's forum. Because it is a forum, it is not possible to determine how many surveys were sent. However, there were 967 collected surveys, 617 of which were completed ones; it took one month to collect the data. The survey was written in English and translated to Arabic. The aim of the survey is to gather personal experiences and opinions regarding the changes within the youth and family traditions and norms.

The researcher observed that there are obvious effects of social media to the people of Saudi Arabia. A survey questionnaire through the employment of the Survey Monkey Software will be formulated to have a clear and accurate measurement of these effects.

### **Data Analysis Procedure**

The completed surveys were subjected to tabulation and analysis through the use of the Survey Monkey Analysis tools as well as Microsoft Excel. The Survey Monkey helped to generate tabulated dissertation reports, charts, and frequencies using the data. The columns in the software signify thesis variables and the rows denote thesis observations or participants. The output file were analyzed using statistical procedures such as frequency tables, cross-tabulations, and different useful graphs such as bar graphs and pie charts.

### **Summary**

In this study, a quantitative research technique was utilized in order to identify the primary effects of social media to the Saudi society. The researcher selected to utilize this research method in view of the objective to acquire first-hand information from the participants. The quantitative method is beneficial for the researcher due to its flexibility. This method exposed the researcher to countless opportunities in choosing the primary instrument for data-gathering. The purpose of the research is to define the effects of social media to the Saudi community.

Primary data were the main type of information gathered in this research. These data were derived from the responses of the participants during the survey process.

With the incorporation of appropriate data gathering instrument and techniques, this research shall provide relevant information in answer to the research problem.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

It is important that the study shall present data gathered to verify what is going on in the real world setting particularly knowing what is going on in Saudi Arabian society with regard to its people's appreciation of how social media networks are creating a great impact in their lives.

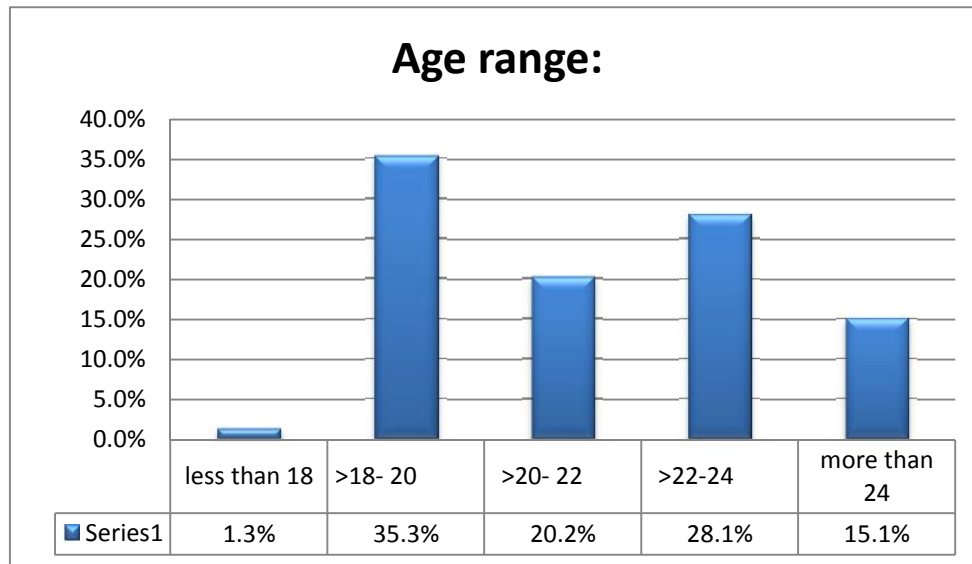
The researcher chose a large Saudi University - University of Dammam – to collect the research study data. This university attracts students from all regions of Saudi Arabia. The survey questions focused on the students' usage of social media and its effect on their customs and traditions. This chapter summarizes and analyzes the data collected from the survey using pie charts, bar charts, and frequency and cross tabulation tables.

#### **Results of the Survey**

**Q1: Age range.** The survey conducted covered subjects of ages 18 until 24; therefore, subjects outside these ranges were automatically excluded by exiting them from the survey. The survey outcome provides that among the subject-respondents of the survey totaling 967, ages 18-20 years old have the highest response rate of 35.3% and thereby this age range was the mode; followed by ages 22-24 then 20-22. The mean age of these students was 20.8 and the median was 21 years old.

**Q2: Nationality.** The survey conducted covered subjects of Saudi citizens only; therefore, participants from other nationalities were automatically excluded

by exiting them from the survey and they were only 0.8%, while 16.7% did not continue the survey. The rest -797 students- were Saudis.



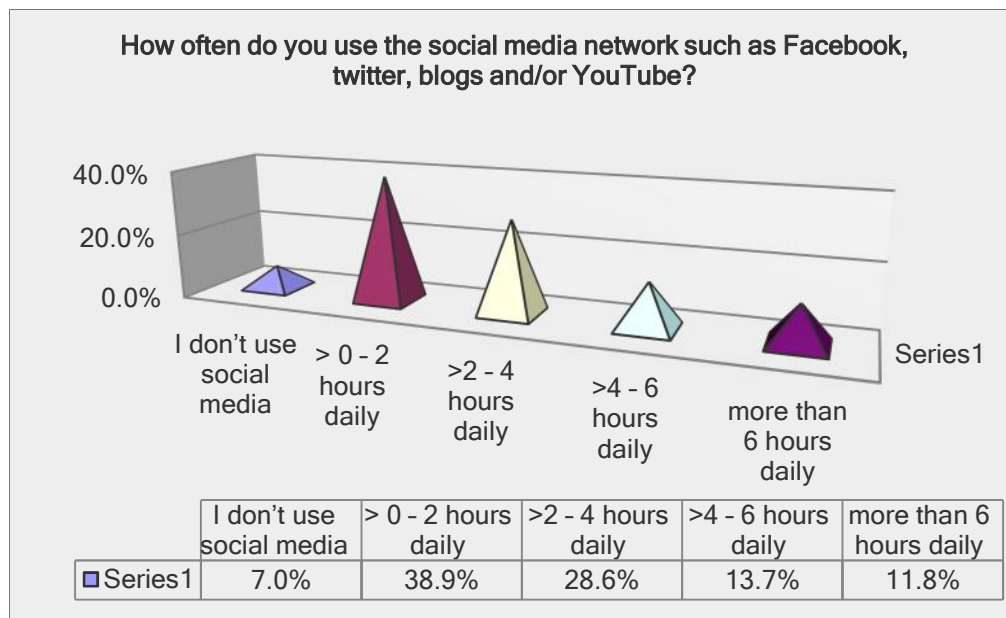
*Figure 3. Age Range*

**Q3: How often do you use the social media network such as Facebook, twitter, blogs and/or YouTube? Facebook , twitter , blogs, YouTube.** With regard to frequency of use of the social media network tools, subject-respondents find it important to use them daily; it is like they are part of their lifestyle as they make sure they check on their social media accounts each day. Their use only varies depending on the number of hours in a day, which could range from 0 to 2 hours, 2-4 hours or 4-6 hours daily.

The average hours spent daily on social media by these students were 2.8 hours daily while the median is 3 hours daily.

**Q4: The reason/s I choose to use social media networks is/are: check all that apply.** Subject-respondents to the survey have identified their varied purposes for using the social media network tools. The highest percentage of 54.7% of the

survey say that they use the tools for updating themselves with the local news; 46.2% use them to make friends from all over the world and are presumably have different cultures to share with each other; 45.6% use them to get updated with international news, while 33.6% use them to keep in touch with family members. Most of the ones who chose other mentioned that it was just for fun and a way to spend free time.

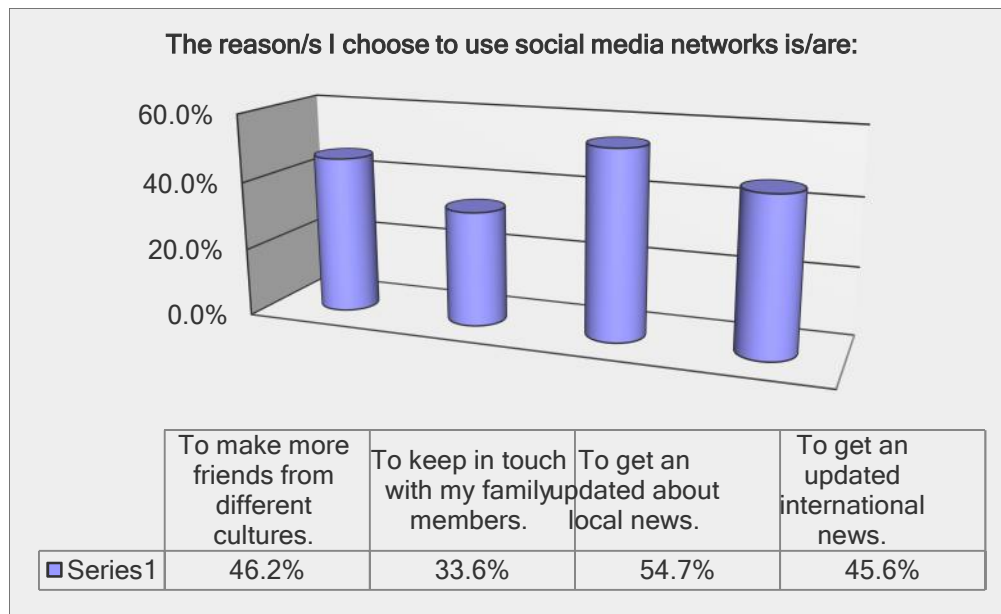


*Figure 4. The Often Use of Social Media*

**Q4: The reason/s I choose to use social media networks is/are: check all that apply.** Subject-respondents to the survey have identified their varied purposes for using the social media network tools. The highest percentage of 54.7% of the survey say that they use the tools for updating themselves with the local news; 46.2% use them to make friends from all over the world and are presumably have different cultures to share with each other; 45.6% use them to get updated with international news, while 33.6% use them to keep in touch with



family members. Most of the ones who chose other mentioned that it was just for fun and a way to spend free time.



*Figure 5. Reasons of Using Social Media*

**Q5: I post news about the Saudi society.** The same survey also shows how the social media networks impact Saudi Society. A huge part of the respondents forming 54.8%, do not post any information about Saudi Society; it goes to show that the social media network tools are not used to promote the interest of Saudi Arabia. Around 24.5% only find it important to post something about what the Saudi Society can offer to the world. With the outcome being seen from the survey, it would seem that respondents are generally using the social media networks for their personal reasons and for their own reading rather than share their society news to the world.

**Q6: I participate and write my opinion about social media topics.** The use of social media networks to render one's opinion about the Saudi Society is not also highly promoted. A large percentage of 32.9% do not see the need to post

their opinions about their society. Perhaps this could mean that the respondents are not seeing the value of doing so to the society or maybe they are not encouraged by the society to render the same. Traditionally and culturally, these could be the factors that hinder respondents to air their opinion about their society. Two participations per week is the average participations for each student.

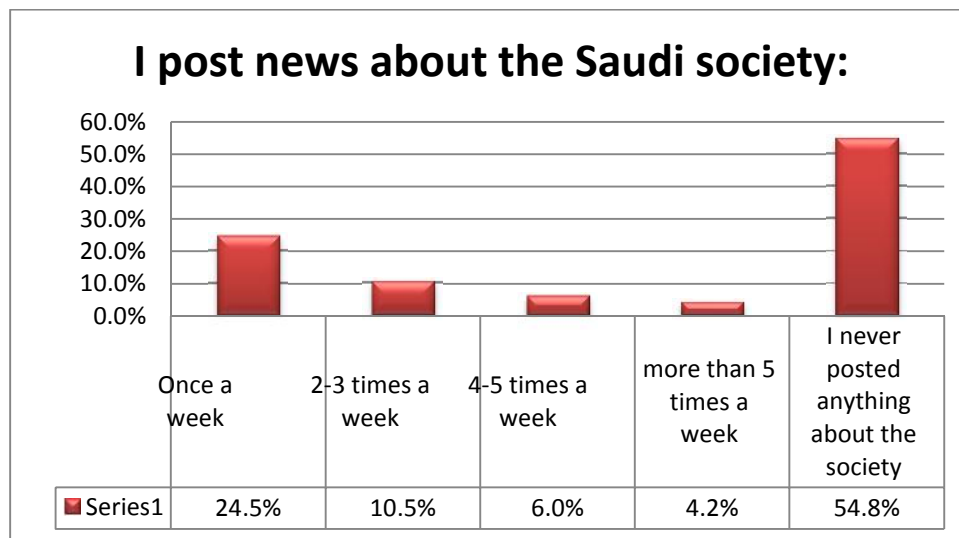
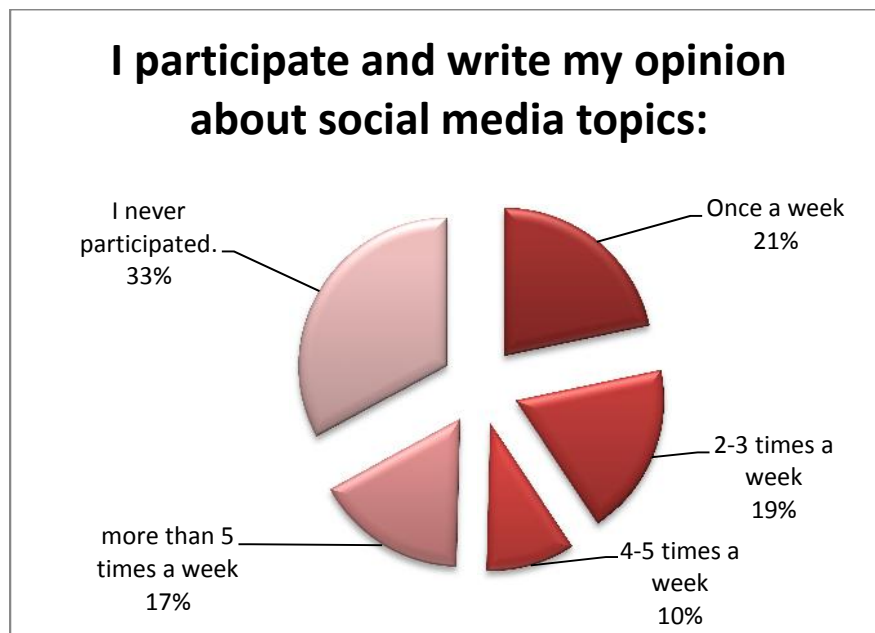


Figure 6. Social News Posting

**Q7: Since I started using social media networks, I noticed that my ability to accept the opposing opinions has been improved.** The survey revealed that a huge percentage of 47.9% of the respondents recognize an improved ability of the society to accept opposing opinions using the social media network tools. This must be apparent because of the increasing number of people who getting used to the new communications technology as means to reach out to people, to air their concerns and be heard as well. This survey results also show that Saudi Society, even if it has conservative traditions and cultures, is now

slowly adapting to change and is seeing the value of technology in moving forward towards economic development and progress.



*Figure 7. Sharing Opinion in Social Media Network per Week*

**Q7: Since I started using social media networks, I noticed that my ability to accept the opposing opinions has been improved.** The survey revealed that a huge percentage of 47.9% of the respondents recognize an improved ability of the society to accept opposing opinions using the social media network tools. This must be apparent because of the increasing number of people who getting used to the new communications technology as means to reach out to people, to air their concerns and be heard as well. This survey results also show that Saudi Society, even if it has conservative traditions and cultures, is now slowly adapting to change and is seeing the value of technology in moving forward towards economic development and progress.

Q8: because of the social media, I have about ----- of foreign friends. If other countries use the social media network tools to meet friends from different parts of the world, Saudi society also sees the same value but not necessarily as other countries see it. A number of the respondents meet foreign friends through social media but the resulting survey does not show that they are heavily using the technology for that purpose since 34% have absolutely no foreign friends at all.

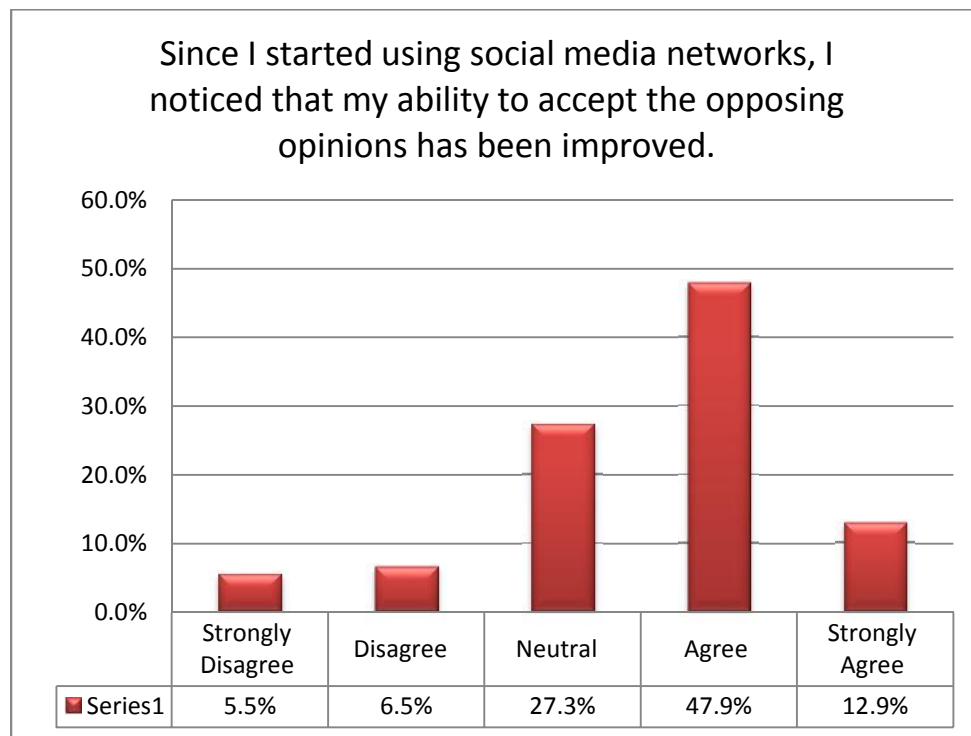


Figure 8. The Effect of Social Media on Accepting the Opposing Opinions

**Q9: The number of my participations (such as Facebook posts or twitter tweets) regarding other cultures than Saudi Arabia within the last two months.** Almost half of the respondents do not even use Facebook posts or twitter tweets regarding other cultures for the last two months. One can say that not much of the respondents use these technological facilities by exposing themselves to other cultures. This could possibly mean that they only relate

socially with fellow Saudi Arabians and not with foreigners. On the other hand, 31.2% posted at least 1 time about other cultures within the last two months. Moreover, the average shows that there were about 4 participations last two months for each participant.

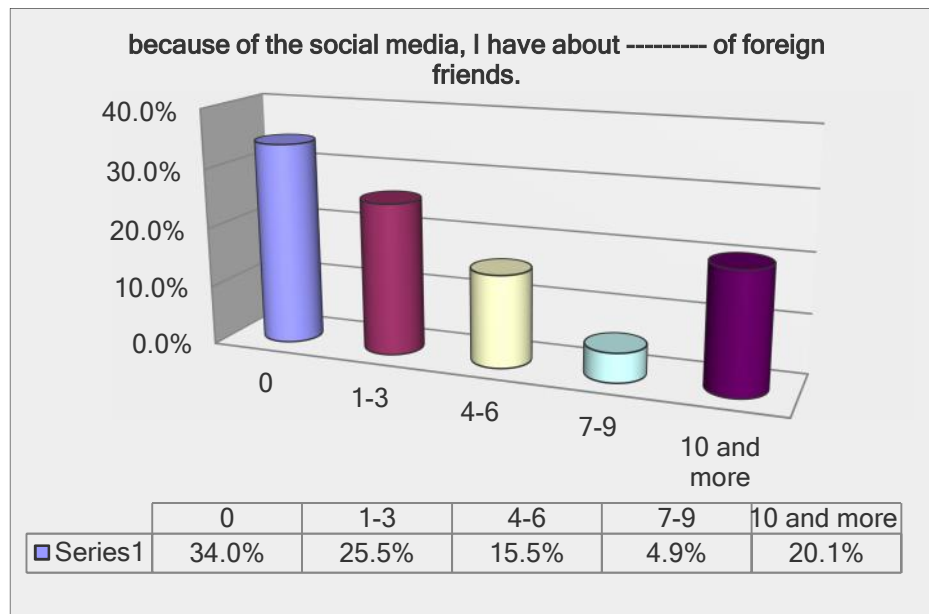


Figure 9. Number of Foreign Friends

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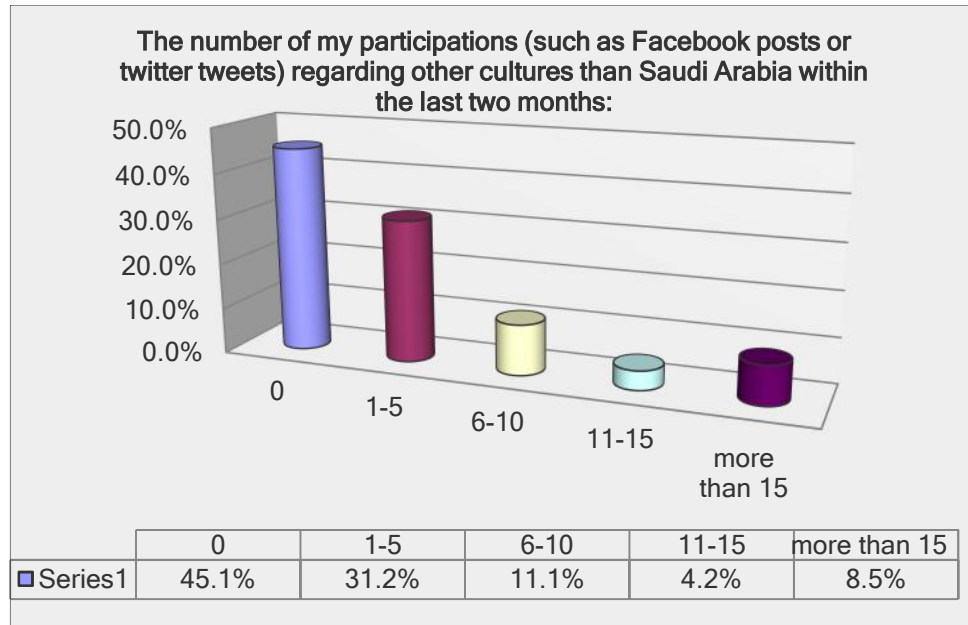


Figure 10. Participations Regarding Other Cultures

**Q10: Because of my family connections with social media, I don't need to keep the tradition of my family's weekly visit as I used to.** Generally, the survey respondents still see the value of keeping the tradition of physically visiting their families the traditional way. With a high percentage of 51.4% of the survey, majority of the respondents do not see that the use of the social media network tools can be a substitute to keep in touch with family and relatives.

**Q11: I have become less interactive with my family since I started using the social media networks.** Additionally, the survey results also show that the majority (57.6%) of the respondents disagree that because of the emergence of the social media networks available within their reach in the society today can very well make them less interactive with their families. In general, the Saudi

population is highly conservative and still keeps most of their traditions intact despite the emergence of technological advancements today.

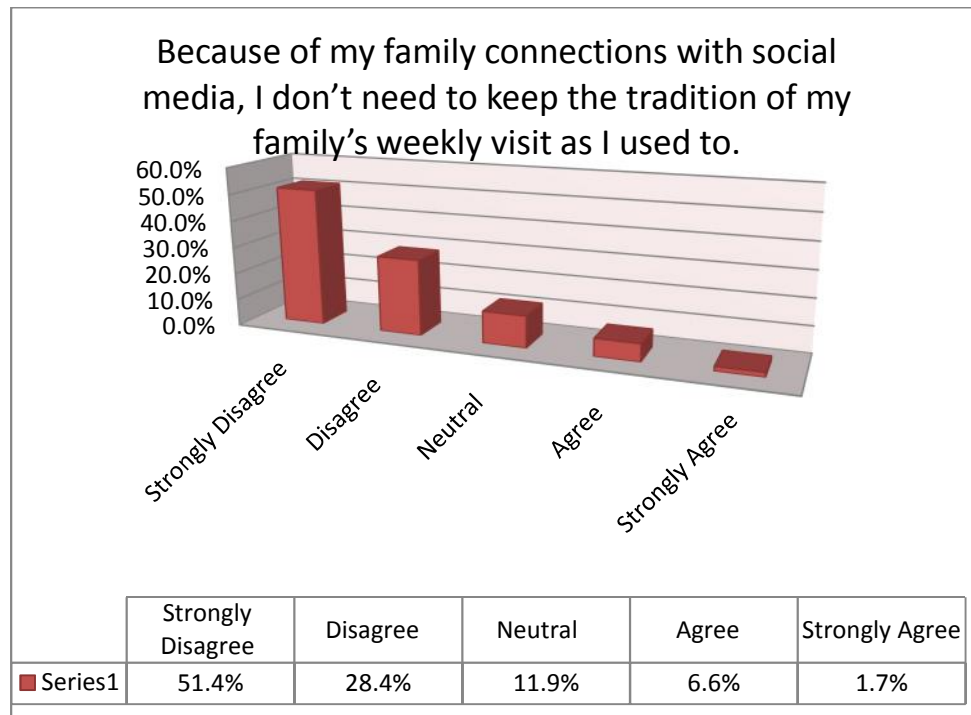


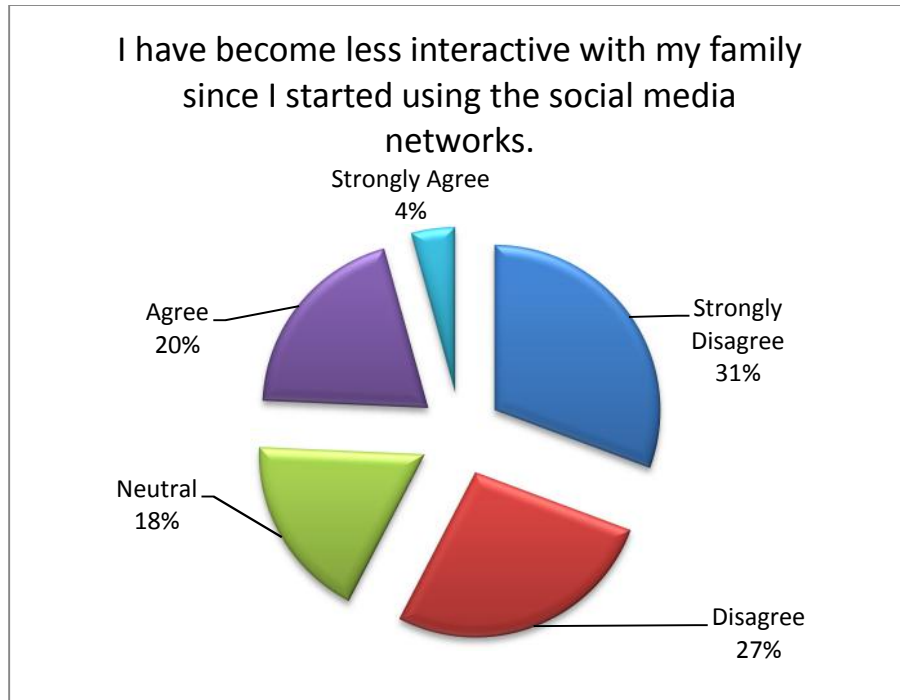
Figure 11. The Effect of Social Media on the Family's Traditional Visit

**Q11: I have become less interactive with my family since I started using the social media networks.** Additionally, the survey results also show that the majority (57.6%) of the respondents disagree that because of the emergence of the social media networks available within their reach in the society today can very well make them less interactive with their families. In general, the Saudi population is highly conservative and still keeps most of their traditions intact despite the emergence of technological advancements today.

**Q12: When I want to communicate with my parents I use (mostly).**

Generally, 78.3% of the respondents find it important to still conduct direct conversation with their families should they have any concerns in the family.

Family relationship that is personal and direct is still given highest regard in the Saudi society. This also goes to show that Saudi's tradition is strong and intact even in the young generations today despite the many other alternative tools available for them to choose from when conducting their relationships with family and friends.



*Figure 12. The Effect of Social Media on the Family Interactions*

**Q13: I prefer taking advice from friends or groups in the social media than from my parents.** The survey results also show that giving advice to family and friends are done effectively in person given that there is no need to discuss matters via the social media network tools- 48.8% of respondents. Believing that people in Saudi are more traditional in conducting themselves with their relationships with other people, there is then no need to course through social



media networks tools to settle issues in this manner. Hence the outcome to survey does not so much show a figure to disprove the analysis in a different way.

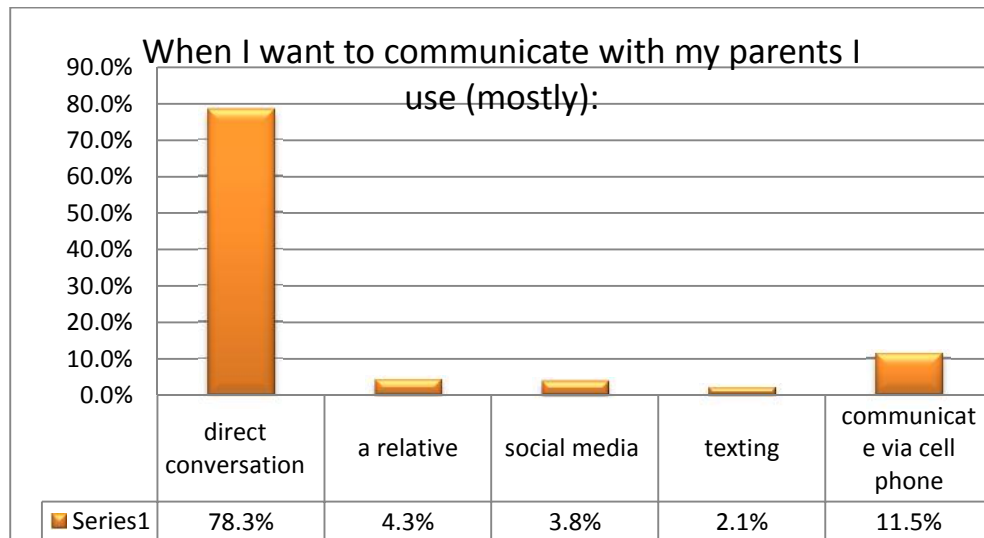
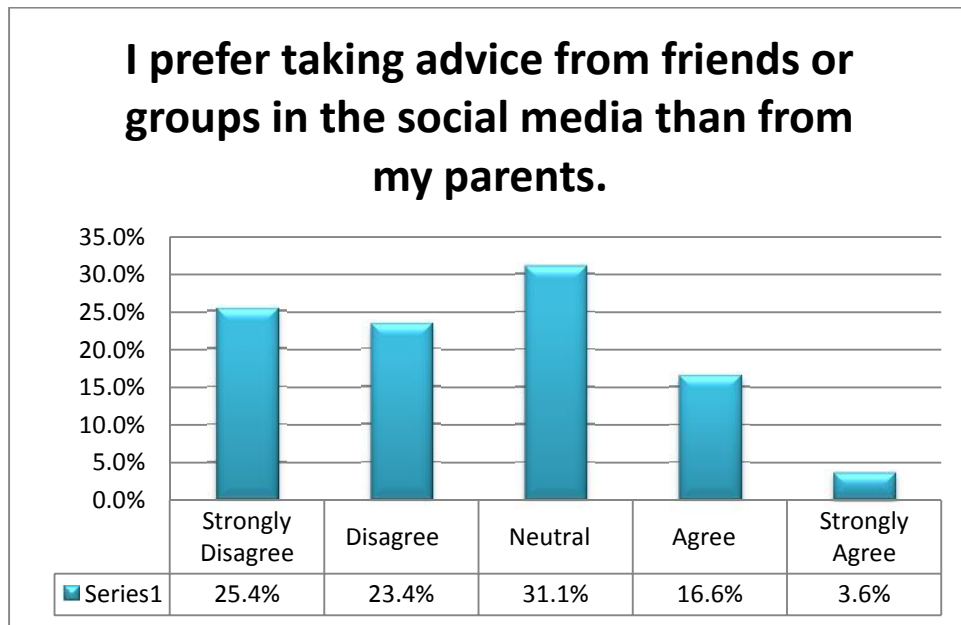


Figure 13. Ways of Communication

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**Q14: Because of the confidence and knowledge I gained from social media, I feel that now I can make a better informed decision than just following what is suggested to me by my family leader (father, big brother, or other family leader).** Given the scenario, 35.9% of the respondents find

themselves more in charge of their choices and their decisions in their lives. They see that because they are secured with their relationships with their families and friends, they are not easily shattered when facing challenges in life, and if they happen to encounter some challenges, they can easily count on the support of their families and friends without need to be looking for advices using the social media network tools, rather they can directly run to their families for support and help.



*Figure 14. Social Media vs. Parental Advisory*

Q15: Using social media networks created a gap between me and my society regarding our customs and traditions. As respondents find themselves very much secured by their traditions and cultures being nurtured in keeping their relationships with their families intact, 52.6% of the respondents do not see any potential gap being created by social media between their relationship with the society; as they are secured and assured well by Saudi's society, the respondents do not see any need to go somewhere else to find support for their needs and

concerns. Their families for them are sufficient in filling up whatever they see what is lacking in them.

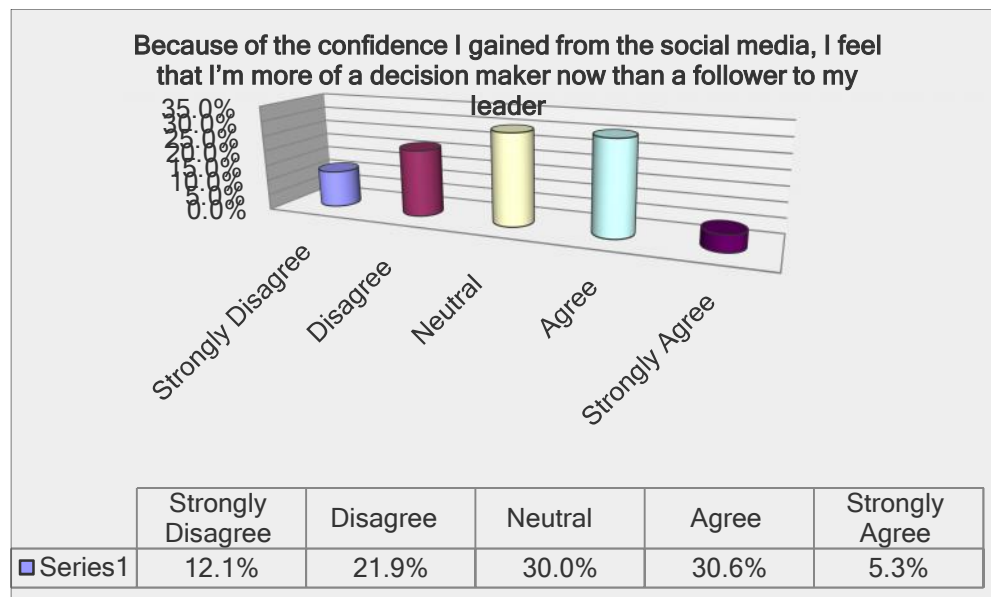
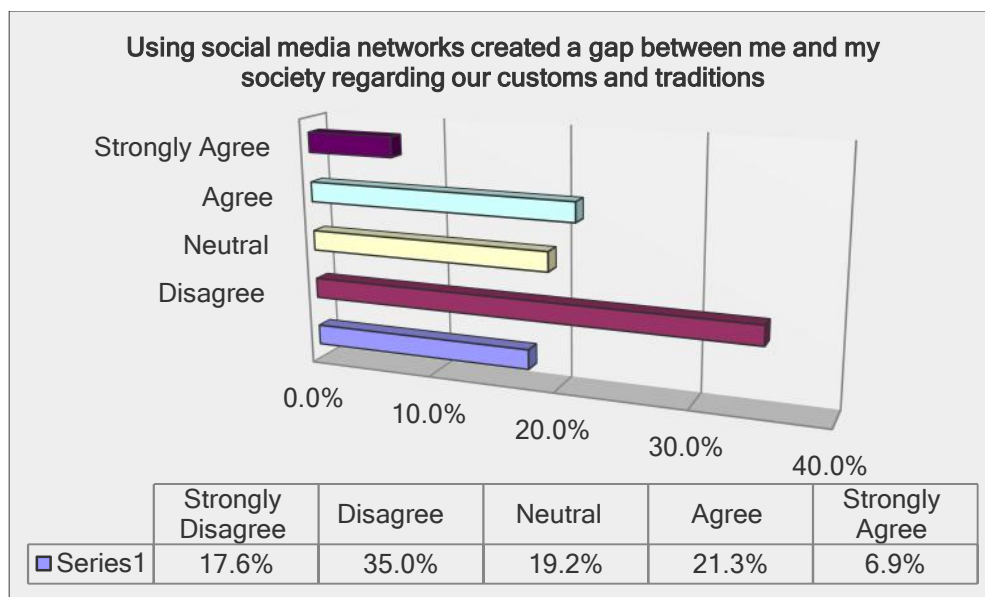


Figure 15. The Effect of Social Media on Decision Making

**Q16: Since I started using the social media network, I started to distinguish what is traditionally "forbidden" than what is forbidden by religion.** Even though the youth are secured as individuals, they also find themselves grounded by what they believe are traditionally forbidden and what are forbidden by their religion. By keeping their traditions and culture intact, may mean they are deeply rooted by what their beliefs are and what are their principles in life, which are mostly influenced by their traditions and cultures. However, they do realize that some for what is known as “forbidden” in their society is not necessarily forbidden by religion from which they must follow.

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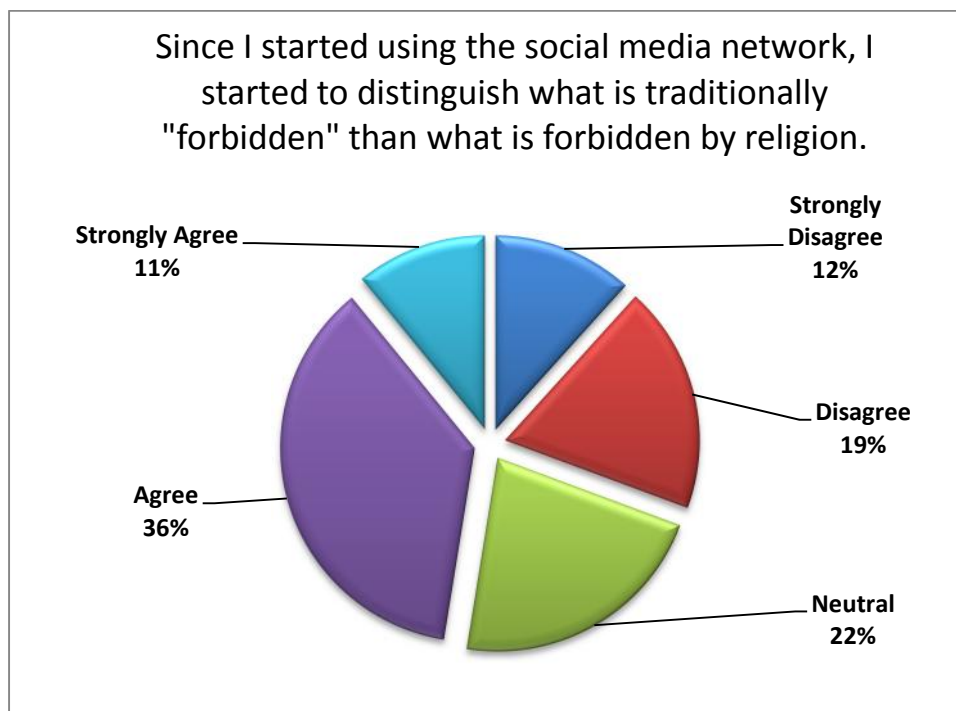


*Figure 16. Potential Gap between the Youth and their Societies*

Q17: Using social media networks did affect my point of view to the local social issues. It is obvious that social media did effect on their point of views regarding social issues since the percentage of respondents who at least agree rather than strongly agree is 52.7 while only 23.8% disagreed.

Q18: Women in my society started to be more knowledgeable about their rights in Islam because of the social media, such as the right of electing, being elected, and

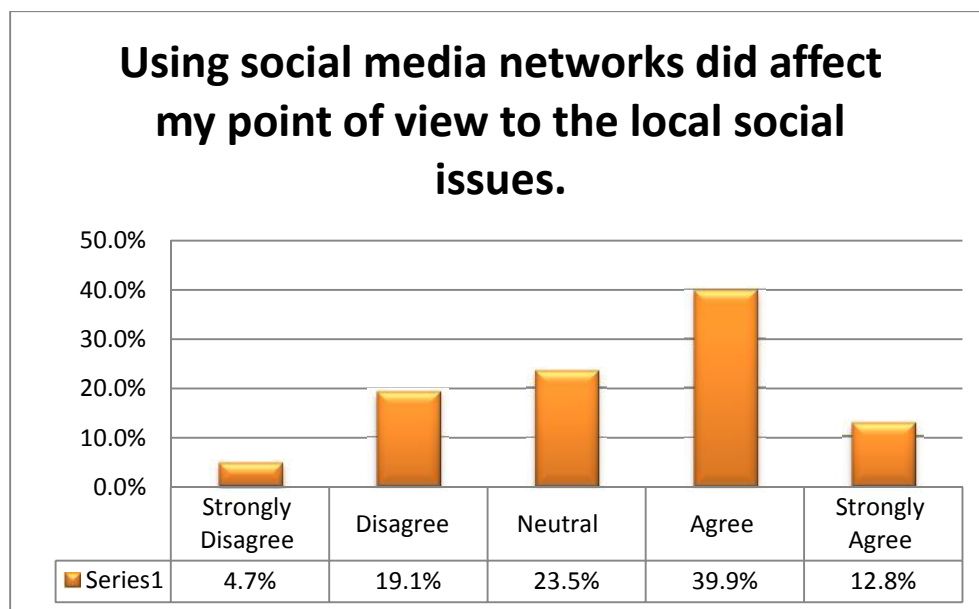
driving, etc. What is surprising about the result of the survey is the fact that social media network tools are used by women to gain more knowledge about their rights in Islam because the survey shows that 53.9% of respondents whether they are women or men agree. Perhaps, this way, women are more liberated in reaching out to other people for more ideas that are not supplied within their society because of the restrictions laid down by their traditions and cultures. What seems to be lacking in the society because of their culture can be supplied by using the social media network tools.



*Figure 17.* Distinguish What is Traditionally "Forbidden" than What is Forbidden by Religion

Q18: Women in my society started to be more knowledgeable about their rights in Islam because of the social media, such as the right of electing, being elected, and driving, etc. What is surprising about the result of the survey is the fact that social

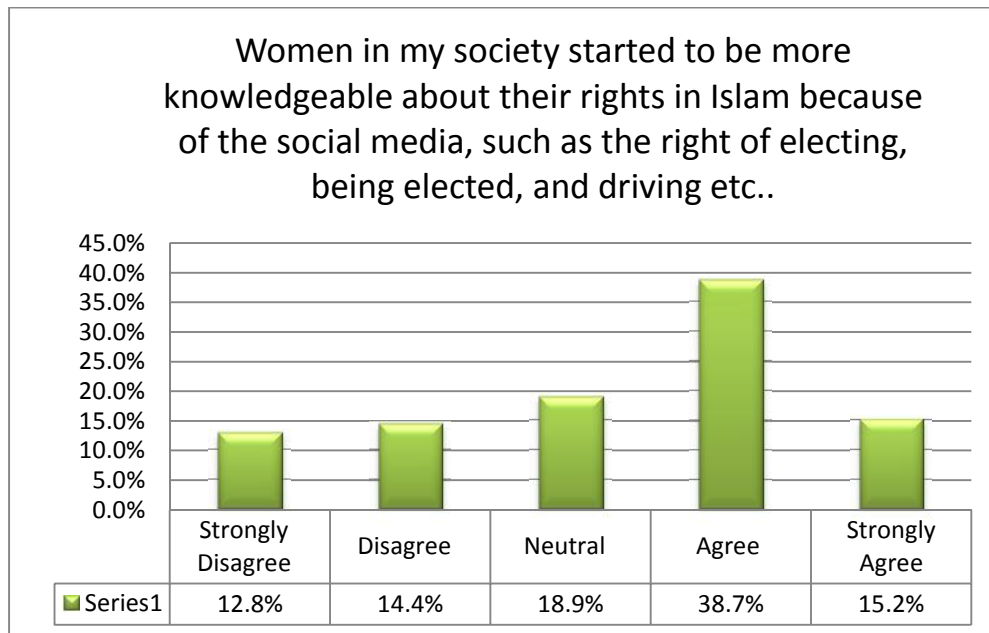
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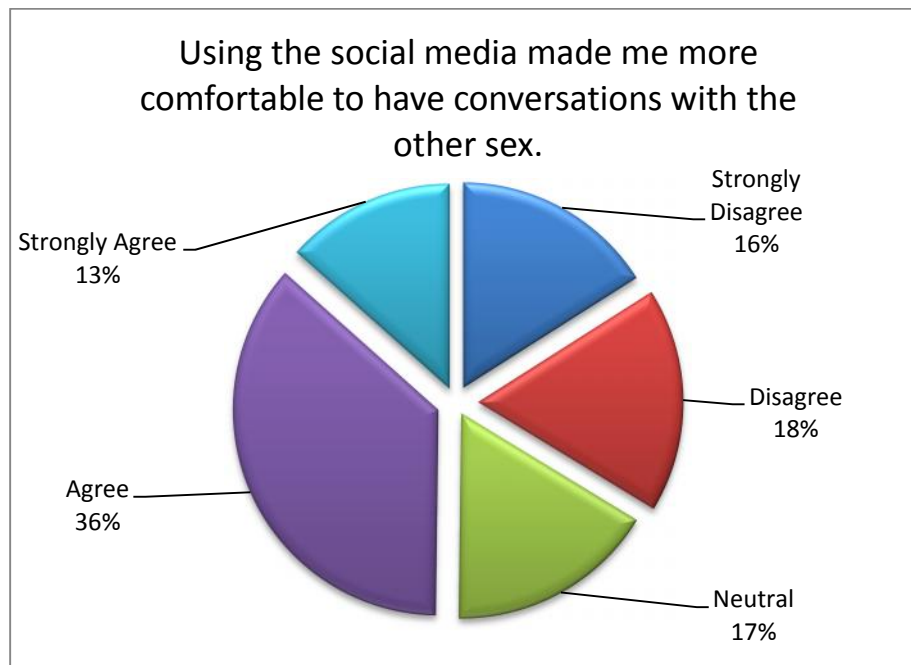
*Figure 18. The Social Media Effect on the Views of Local Issues*

Q19: Using the social media made me more comfortable to have conversations with the other sex. The same findings are also evident when the survey results also revealed that 49.8% of the respondents make use of the social media networks tools when conversing with people of the opposite sex. Perhaps these findings are apparent because the Saudi traditions are so conservative which

limits their interaction between males and females, hence they resort to the social media network tools to compliment their interests.



*Figure 19.* The effect of Social Media on Women Knowledge

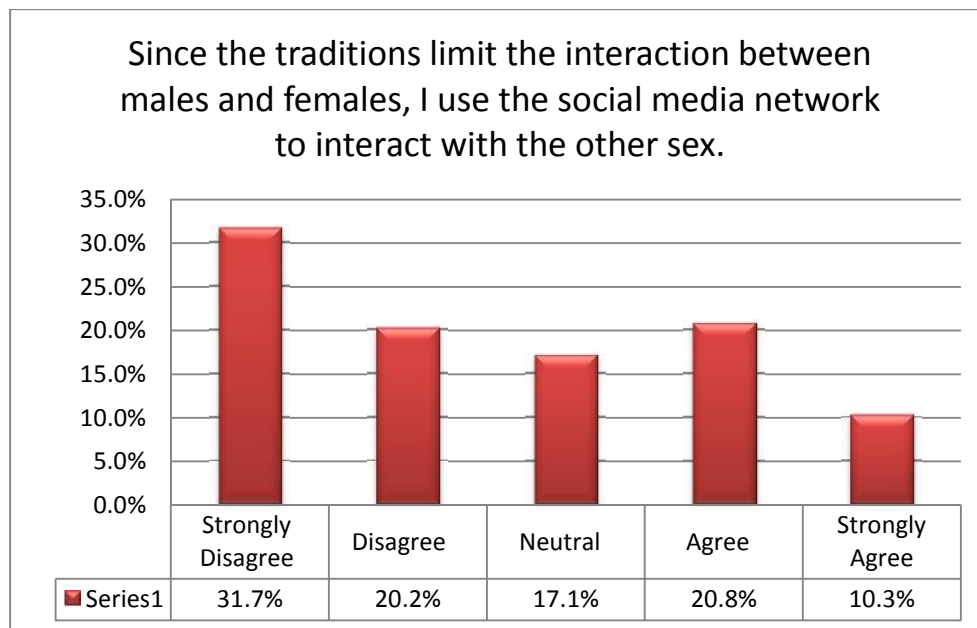


*Figure 20.* Conversation with the other Sex Using Social Media

**Q20: Since the traditions limit the interaction between males and females, I use the social media network to interact with the other sex.** Even though participants did agree previously that social media made them more comfortable to have conversations with the opposite sex, it seems that they don't believe that they use the social media to interact with the other sex because of their society limitations.

**Q21: When a major event happens in my society, the first source I use to get the most recent information is.** The survey did show that most of the respondents (45.2%) don't wait for the local T.V. news or the local newspapers. They take their local news from the social media.

**Q22: Gender.** Females respondents 54.4% were more than the males as shown below.



*Figure 21. The Effect of Social Media on the Interactions between Opposite Sexes*



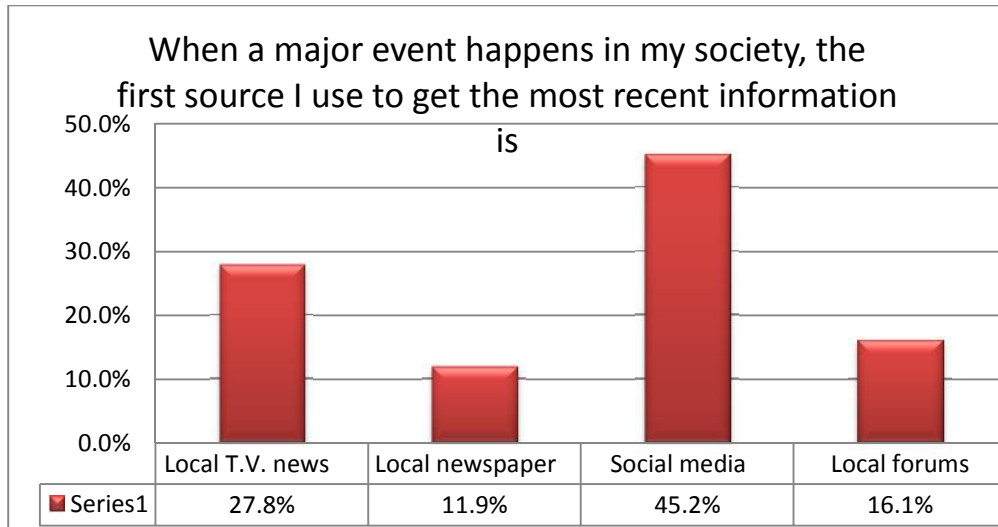


Figure 22. Most Recent News Source

**Q22: Gender.** Females respondents 54.4% were more than the males as shown below.

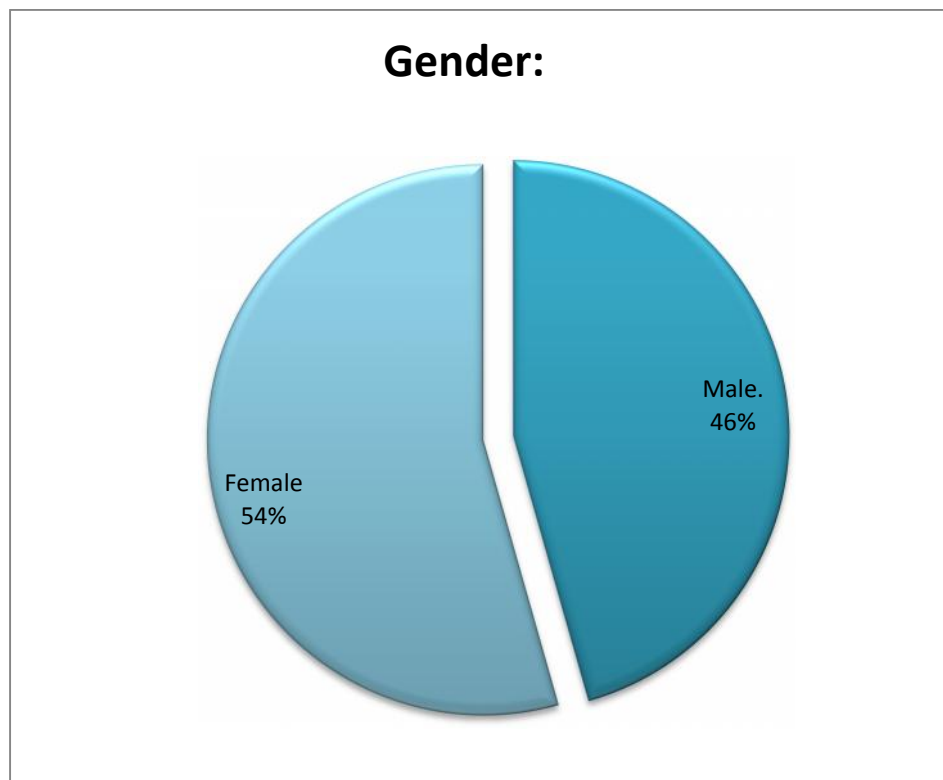


Figure 23. Male participants Vs. Females

## Cross Tabulations

The number of hours was chosen as the independent variable to study the relation between it and other dependent variables, such as age, accepting other opinion, having conversations with the other sex, gap in society, keeping family tradition, and self-decision making.

- 1- The relationship between the number of hours of using the social media and age:

This crosstab shows that 42.3% of students who use the social media 0-2 hours daily are between 18-20. We can also notice that the highest percentage of students who use the social media more than 6 hours daily (43.8%) are within the same group. We can conclude that this age group is the most active regarding socializing using the SMN.

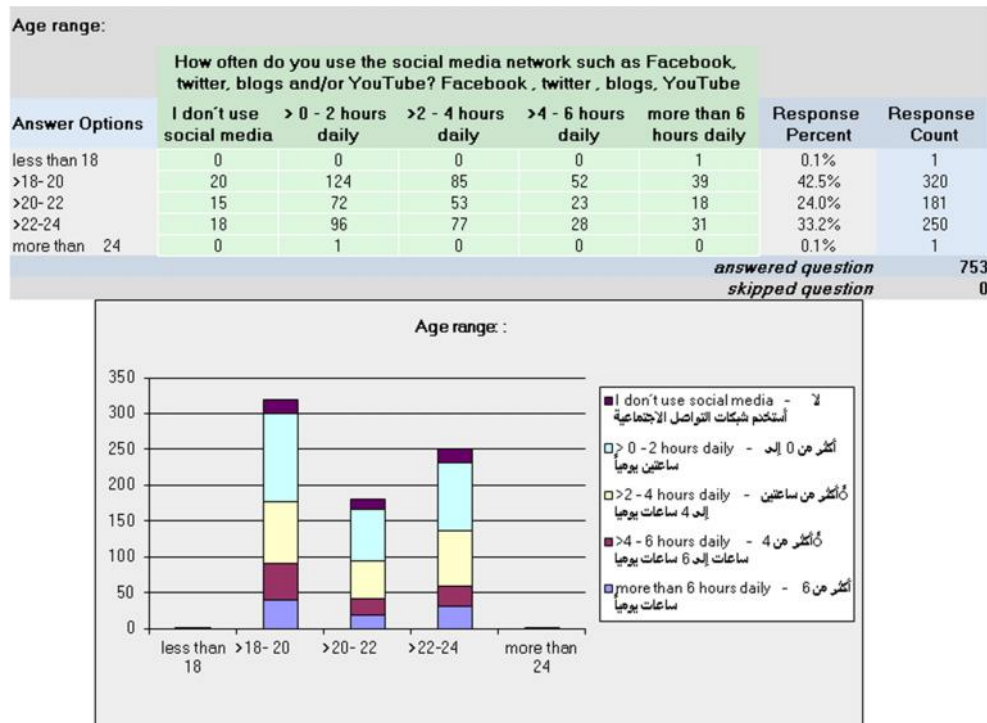


Figure 24. Cross Tabulation 1

1- The relation between the number of hours of using the social media and accepting the opposing opinion:

Youth tend to agree that they have noticed to be more accepting to other's opinions than before starting using SMN. Over-all, it seems that the concept and the use of social media developed their abilities to have a conversation and opened their minds to other views regardless of how long they use the SMN.

2- The relation between the number of hours of using the social media and having conversations with the other sex:

Youth of different use of SMN tend to agree that they have become more comfortable talking and having conversations with the opposite sex. Therefore, in general the concept of social media in general developed this regardless of how long they use the SMN.

1- The effect of social media of the interactivity within the family:

The data show that the more they used social media the more they believe that they have become less interactive with their families since 39.4% of students who used the social media less than two hours daily said they strongly disagreed. On the other hand, 33.9% of students who used the social media more than six hours daily said they agreed.

1- The effect of social media on self-decision making:

Also, it seems that the more students use social media networks the more they tend to make their own decisions rather than following their family's leader. The data show that 25.8% of students who used SMN less than two hours daily disagreed with the statement while 47.4% of students who used SMN more than six hours daily agreed with it.

Since I started using social media networks, I noticed that my ability to accept the opposing opinions has been improved.

Answer Options	How often do you use the social media network such as Facebook, twitter, blogs and/or YouTube? Facebook , twitter , blogs, YouTube					Response Percent	Response Count
	I don't use social media	> 0 - 2 hours daily	>2 - 4 hours daily	>4 - 6 hours daily	more than 6 hours daily		
Strongly Disagree	0	22	2	3	4	5.5%	31
Disagree	0	23	7	5	2	5.5%	37
Neutral	0	73	46	22	14	27.3%	155
Agree	1	98	101	43	29	47.9%	272
Strongly Agree	0	13	30	13	17	12.9%	73
<b>Total</b>							<b>568</b>

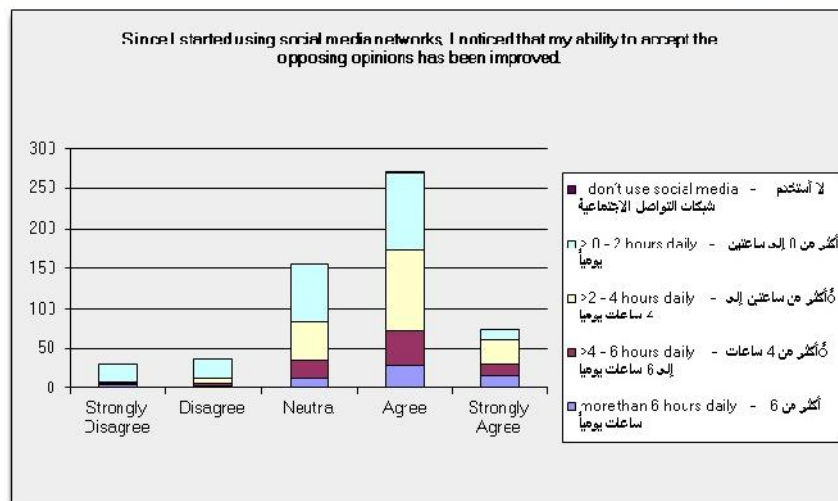


Figure 25. Cross Tabulation 2

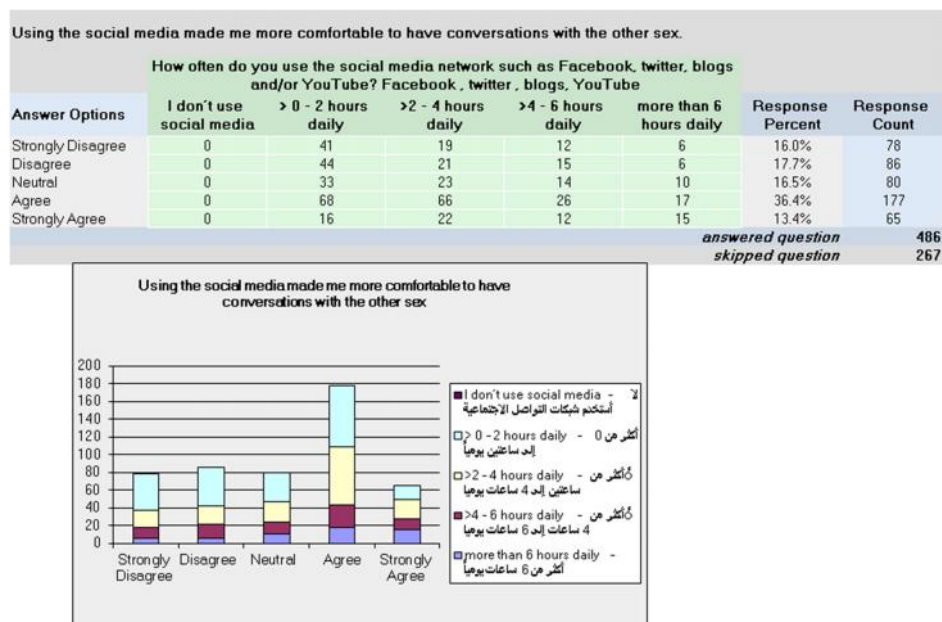


Figure 26. Cross Tabulation 3

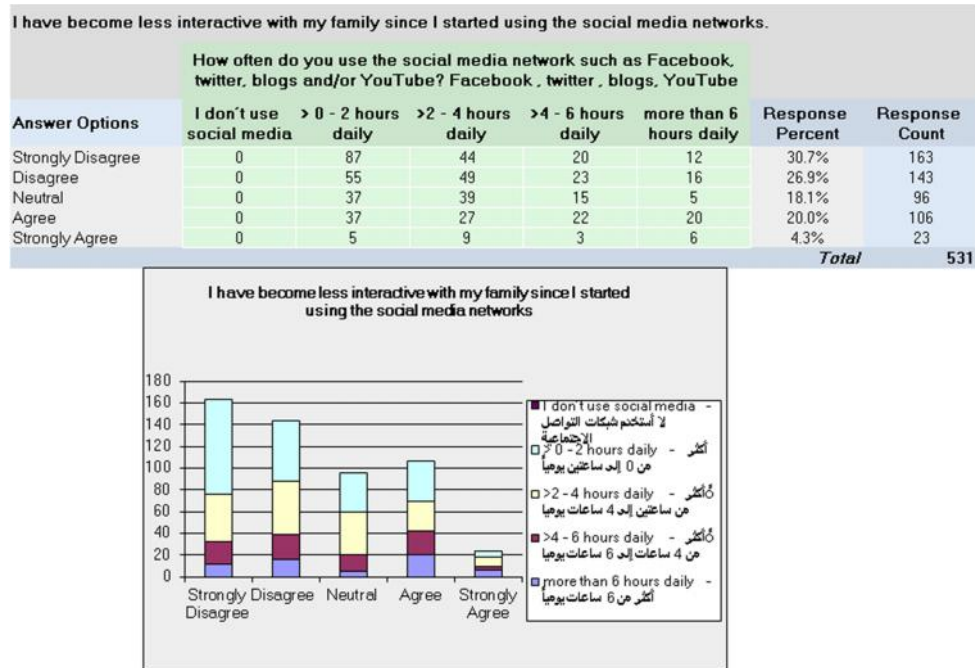


Figure 27. Cross Tabulation 4

6- Whether the use of SMN created a gap between Saudi youth and their society:

The data show that no matter how much they use SMN, they tend to believe that there is no gap created after their use of SMN.

7- The relation between the number of hours of using the social media and keeping family traditions:

Similarly, it seems that youth of Saudi Arabia are traditional when it comes to family tradition since the majority of each group, who used the SMN differently time wise, either disagreed or strongly disagreed with not feeling the need to keep their family traditional visits.

Because of the confidence and knowledge I gained from social media, I feel that now I can make a better informed decision than just following what is suggested to me by my family leader (father, big brother, or other family leader).

Answer Options	How often do you use the social media network such as Facebook, twitter, blogs and/or YouTube? Facebook , twitter , blogs, YouTube					Response Percent	Response Count
	I don't use social media	> 0 - 2 hours daily	>2 - 4 hours daily	>4 - 6 hours daily	more than 6 hours daily		
Strongly Disagree	0	42	14	4	1	12.1%	61
Disagree	0	54	36	16	5	21.9%	111
Neutral	0	56	51	30	15	30.0%	152
Agree	0	49	52	27	27	30.6%	155
Strongly Agree	0	8	7	3	9	5.3%	27
answered question							506
skipped question							247

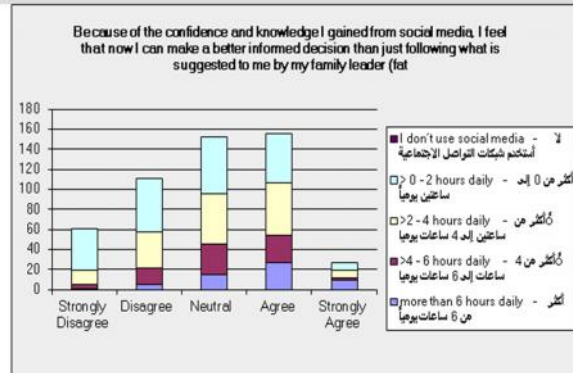


Figure 28. Cross Tabulation 5

Using social media networks created a gap between me and my society regarding our customs and traditions

Answer Options	How often do you use the social media network such as Facebook, twitter, blogs and/or YouTube? Facebook , twitter , blogs, YouTube					Response Percent	Response Count
	I don't use social media	> 0 - 2 hours daily	>2 - 4 hours daily	>4 - 6 hours daily	more than 6 hours daily		
Strongly Disagree	0	50	26	10	3	17.6%	89
Disagree	0	70	50	35	22	35.0%	177
Neutral	0	41	34	13	9	19.2%	97
Agree	0	37	40	17	14	21.3%	108
Strongly Agree	0	11	10	5	9	6.9%	35
answered question							506
skipped question							247

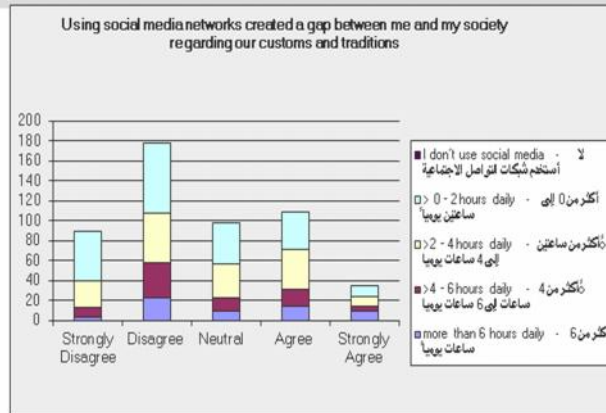


Figure 29. Cross Tabulation 6

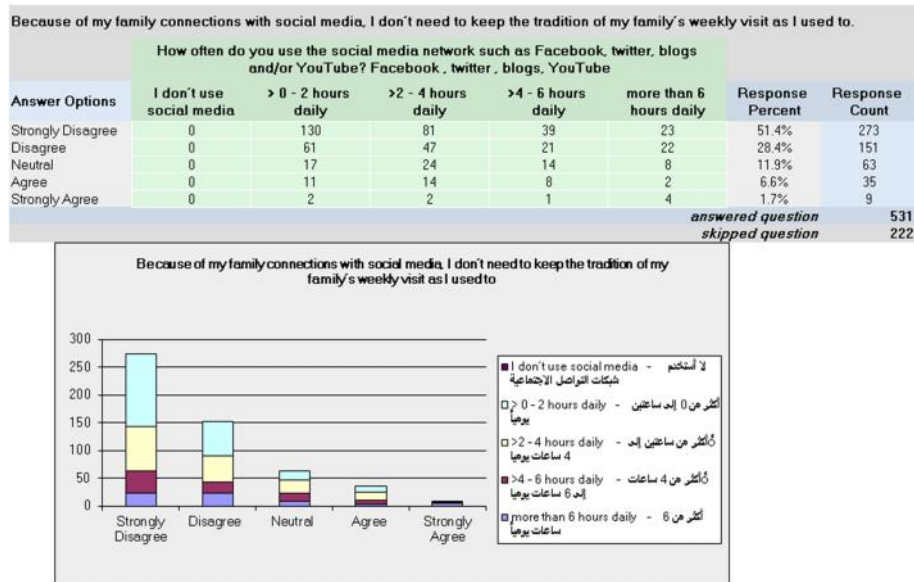


Figure 30. Cross Tabulation 7

## Summary

By running the survey, data and information concerning social media in Saudi Arabia will enable to affirm what used to be just a notion or an opinion but is now going to be verified with facts. The survey results shall serve as basis to determine how social media are affecting the Saudi society, especially how they impact the youth and their families in line with keeping customs and traditions alive even today and how they could impact the future. Moreover, the survey shall also be an effective and reliable tool to determine positive and negative effects to the Saudi Society considering that Saudi Arabia has to keep up with the pace of advancements and yet has to preserve their customs and traditions, which are also important aspects of the Saudi Society.

This chapter presented the results of the survey. Charts and tables were provided for each set of survey answers. The last chapter will conclude these results and will provide recommendations for further studies.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

In this portion of the paper, the entirety of the information gathered on this topic, as well as the results gathered during the research process will be summarized. The data, which focused on the usage of social media and its effects on customs and traditions of Saudi youth, was collected mostly from the students of the University of Dammam. The results of the survey show the respondents are 967 in number, aging 18 to 24 years old, and demonstrate a majority of female students. However since the study is limited to Saudi citizens, only respondents belonging to other nations were automatically excluded in the survey, thus leaving a total number of 797 Saudi students who participated in the study.

The study formulated an assortment of variables with regards to social media in order to collect a thorough and detailed spread of data so to further explore the topic. The number of hours subjects spent on social media was made the independent variable of the study, while the dependent variables were coded to include age, acceptance of the opinions of others, interaction with the other sex, possible gaps in the society, keeping family traditions, as well as the effect on their self-decision making processes.

After reviewing the independent variable of the study, a relationship was established between the number of hours of use of any form of social media and age of respondents. This relationship recorded people aging 18-20 years old are the most active users of social media. The average amount of hours respondents reported spent on any forms of social media each day is 2.8 hours. However,



several of the subjects also claim they utilize social media at least 6 hours in a day.

In regards to dependent variables, several key results were collected. The study showed that social media helped the youths to be more open to others' opinions. Additionally, because of social media, the subjects are also able to gain access and updates on local news. Further, they make friends with people from different cultures as well as with the opposite sex.

In regards to respondents who answered the open-ended parts of the question, many mentioned that social media is a way for them to spend their free time, to be entertained, and to have fun. It is clear social media is indeed a good tool to attain freedom of expression, communication, as well as a venue somehow to get the communication and relationships youths want in their lives.

The results of the study show that most of the respondents tend to use social media for their own personal reasons and benefits rather than for their society, like sharing and giving opinions and posting news regarding Saudi society. The subjects relate socially with fellow Saudis rather than with foreigners on these sites. While the subjects turn to social media to strengthen or cultivate relationships, the majority of the respondents do not agree that social media is a good alternative for getting in touch with families. Saudis generally respect the closeness of their family, as well as their traditions, in the sense that social media will not become a hindrance for them to become less interactive with their family as well as in the traditions they are practicing. Additionally, most of the respondents claim social media will not make any possible gaps between the

youth and the society, because for these respondents, the support they earn from their families is enough to strengthen the subjects relationship with their families.

With regards to the claim of the respondents to the effects of social media on their opinions and principles, most of them agree that social media indeed can influence their thinking. Furthermore, the survey shows that social media greatly affects women more than men. Most of the respondents stated that women started to be more knowledgeable and aware on their rights in Islam as well as in their society primarily because of social media. Using social media, women in particular tend to gain freedom in earning knowledge and at the same time expressing their thoughts and feelings as well as expressing in writing and in public their insights on different things. Because of social media, women are not restricted to converse or interact with other sex as they normally are in public and private venues. In such a way, women gain their independence from a conservative culture of Saudis.

Obviously, from the survey results, we can indicate that the structure and the importance of the family have not changed radically. Youth still put their families at the top; however, it appears there are changes within the ideas about social relations. The roles of the family members are potentially changing. In the past, the family leader such as the father was mainly the only decision maker. Now, family members became part of that decision-making system and youth are more self-dependent regarding their decisions.

Al-Saggaf (2004) concluded in his study that youth gained more self-confidence in online communities and became more open-minded. This comes in

an alliance with this study's results. However, he mentioned as a negative result that youth neglected their family commitments. In this study, it was obvious that youth are keeping their family traditions in a sacred way. Regarding the communication between the different genders, he declared that the online communication between the two genders has made them understand each other better. This was also an observed result in this study, as males and females seem more comfortable communicating with each other because of the social media.

In conclusion, this study's research demonstrates that social media does not really influence the society of Saudi Arabia in terms of changes compared to the time there was no SMN. Despite the fact that traditions are not being radically altered, there is some potential of significant changes that we can deduct from youth's ideas. Even though social media is really enticing, the citizens of Saudi Arabia still value and respect their traditions. Although it shows that there is awareness regarding women's issues, still this influence has not significantly altered the tradition and culture of the country. Therefore, some of these results from this study differ from Al-Saggaf's results and what he concluded. It must be noted that Al-Saggaf's study was issued in the same year of the creation of Facebook; therefore, the online impact might not include the SMN.

From analyzing the surveys, it is obvious that women are more active in the social media world and value it more than men, which correspond to their apparent activity in the blogosphere as shown in other researches. This could be because of how women react to a patriarchal society, which gives them more opportunities using the SMN to raise issues than men. The research suggests that

this new media could empower women. Moreover, the respondents were more women than men in a university that has more male students than females.

### **Recommendations**

From the findings and conclusions drawn, the following recommendations, which are divided into two categories, were formulated:

**For the Saudi Society in General.** This study would be a great help for Saudi organizations in general and for the Saudi society for numerous reasons. This research on the effects of social media on the country of Saudi Arabia will provide these groups with information regarding the effects of social media in their society, may it be of advantage or disadvantage on their part. This study could educate and make readers aware of the scope of social media's influence on their society. In such a way, these people, especially those involved in the Saudi organizations for youth population, may more clearly understand the problems and/or benefits of social media to and in their society and organize and create rules, regulations and policies responding to the given phenomenon. The institutions might initiate seminars, symposia and workshops open for all so that more and more people may be updated of the advance and new approaches, information, trends and opportunities from which they too could participate and share concerns over the influences that social media might bring to their society, thus the population in general will greatly benefit.

With the use of this research, the general public of Saudi Arabia, including Saudi institutions will realize the importance of social media for the improvement and development of their society. Social media might bring good or bad effects to

their society, however it is noted in this research that social media can be of great help to improve a society. Social media may aid in fast and easy communication as well as aid in giving information. Saudi institutions and the society might be able to use social media by means of associating it with their daily activities but not abusing it. Social media is a very useful instrument to gain knowledge and to communicate easily. Additionally, social media allows international and domestic social interactions, thus bridging the gap between various cultures and traditions.

**For Future Researchers.** Future researchers may conduct the same study using different variables, such as academic level and annual income. These studies can involve more respondents from Saudi Arabia in order to further determine and analyze the responses of the people who have not been included on the present study. It is better if the next researchers on this topic will try to engage the male population as respondents of the study more extensively to have a better and equal opinion on the matter, especially since the women and men in the country of Saudi Arabia are considered to have unequal rights in many terms. Also, the researcher suggests for future researchers to include the effects of social media on the Saudi society, with both its advantages and disadvantages given in different aspects, such as the effects of social media on children, on politics and government, on trade and industry, and on the economy. Furthermore it is significant to study the effect of SMN on women since this study found women to be open and expressive when an opportunity for them to share their opinions and their beliefs to communicate with their society was allowed. Additionally, it helps us to understand the complexities of technological effects on social change. This

study may hopefully be just the beginning for future studies to help the Saudi society become more connected to the updated technologies in order to modernize their society.

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## APPENDIX A

### QUESTIONNAIRE COVER LETTER IN ENGLISH

Dear participant,

I'm a graduate student in Global Technology and Development Program in the School of Letters and Sciences at Arizona State University in the United States of America.

I am conducting a research study to investigate whether the social media such as Facebook and Twitter has an effect on the Saudi society. For the purpose of this Thesis, I am inviting your participation, which will involve about 10 to 15 minutes of your time to c fill-out the survey.

You should be older than 18 years old, and your participation in the study is voluntary. You can skip questions if you wish. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the survey at any time, there will be no penalty.

Your responses will be anonymous and the results of this study may be used in reports or presentation, and results will only be shared in the aggregated form.

There are no risks of taking this survey since it is 100% anonymous. Also, there will be no financial or physical benefits for you.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please contact me –  
Yousef Alsharkh- at [yalshark@asu.edu](mailto:yalshark@asu.edu)

Thank you for your participation/

Note: If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, through the ASU Office of Research Integrity and Assurance, at [\(480\) 965-6788](tel:4809656788).

APPENDIX B

QUESTIONNAIRE COVER LETTER IN ARABIC

عزيزي

يوسف عليا  
ولاية اريزونا الولايات الامريكية .  
تطوير التكنولوجيا العالمية كلية

حاليا الماجستير الهدف منها هو  
التويتر الاستبيان يأخذ 10  
الاجتماعية الفيسبوك  
هذه 15 دقيقة .

يجب 18  
الاجابه عنها تستطيع  
هذه الاختيارية . تستطيع اسئله  
الاستبيان . يكون هناك

الاسئله مجهولة  
يتم عرضها رمزيه . يكون هناك  
100% يكون هناك مادية عليك  
لديك يرجع الاليميل  
تقرير لهذه  
مجهولة

[yalshark@asu.edu](mailto:yalshark@asu.edu)

لديك المشاركين  
ولاية اريزونا  
بهذه تستطيع مدير  
(480) 965-6788.

APPENDIX C

THE QUESTIONNAIRE IN ENGLISH

1. Age range : ☐ less than 18 ☐ 18-20 ☐ 20-22 ☐ 22-24 ☐ more than 24 (<18, >24 were excluded)

2. Nationality: ☐ Saudi ☐ Non Saudi (none Saudi were excluded)
3. How often do you use the social media network such as Facebook, twitter, blogs and/or youtube?
- ☐ I don't use social media ☐ > 0- 2 hours daily. ☐ >2- 4 hours daily ☐ >4- 6 hours daily ☐ morethan 6 hours daily.
4. The reason/s I choose to use social media networks is/are: check all that apply
- ☐ To make more friends from different cultures.
- ☐ To keep in touch with my family members.
- ☐ To get an updated about local news.
- ☐ To get an updated international news.
- ☐ Other, please specify:-----
5. I post news about the Saudi society:
- Once a week- 2-3 times a week - 4-5 times a week - more than 5 - I never posted anything about the society.
6. I participate and write my opinion about social media topics
- Once a week- 2-3 times a week - 4-5 times a week - more than 5 - I never participated.
7. Since I started using social media networks, I noticed that my ability to accept the opposing opinions has been improved.
- ☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree
8. because of the social media, I have about ----- of foreign friends.
- 0, 1-3, 4-6, 7-9, 10 and more
9. The number of my participations (such as Facebook posts or twitter tweets) regarding other cultures than Saudi Arabia within the last two months :
- 0, 1-5, 6-10, 11-15, more than 15.

10. Because of my family connections with social media, I don't need to keep the tradition of my family's weekly visit as I used to.

☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree

11. I have become less interactive with my family since I started using the social media networks.

☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree

12. When I want to communicate with my parents I use (mostly):

☐ Direct conversation ☐ a relative ☐ social media ☐ texting ☐ communicate via cell phone.

13. I prefer taking advice from friends or groups in the social media than from my parents.

☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree

14. Because of the confidence and knowledge I gained from social media, I feel that now I can make a better informed decision than just following what is suggested to me by my family leader (father, big brother, or other family leader).

☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree

15. Using social media networks created a gap between me and my society regarding our customs and traditions.

☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree

16. Since I started using the social media network, I started to distinguish what is traditionally "forbidden" than what is forbidden by religion.

☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree

17. Using social media networks did affect my point of view to the local social issues.

☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree

18. Women in my society started to be more knowledgeable about their rights in Islam because of the social media, such as the right of electing, being elected, and driving etc..



☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree

19. Using the social media made me more comfortable to have conversations with the other sex.

☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree

20. Since the traditions limit the interaction between males and females, I use the social media network to interact with the other sex.

☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree

21. When a major event happens in my society, the first source I use to get the most recent information is:

☐ Local T.V. news

☐ Local newspaper

☐ Social media

☐ Local forums

☐ other, please specify:

☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree

22. Gender: ☐ female ☐ Male.

APPENDIX D

THE QUESTIONNAIRE IN ARABIC

24 ) 24 -22 22-20 20- 18 – 18 : -1  
24 سوف يتم حذف الاستبيان ( 18  
74

2- الجنسية : غير سعودي ( الغير سعودي سوف يتم حذف الاستبيان ).

3- كم غالباً تستخدم شبكات التواصل الاجتماعية الـ YouTube , blogs ,twitter , Facebook  
لا أستخدم شبكات التواصل الاجتماعية 0 – 2 > ساعة يومياً. 4 – 2 > ساعة يومياً.

6 – 4 > ت يومياً .

4- سبب / أسباب اختياري لإستخدام شبكات التواصل الاجتماعية هو/ هي إختار جميع ما ينطبق

لتكوين أصدقاء كثر من ثقافات مختلفة

الأخبار المحلية

للحصول على آخر الأخبار من الأخبار العالمية

لأسباب أخرى . الرجاء كتابتها .....

5- أقوم بوضع أخبار متعلقة بالمجتمع السعودي في مواقع شبكات التواصل الاجتماعية

3-2 – 5-4 – 5 –

6- أشارك واكتب رأيي في مواقع شبكات التواصل الاجتماعية

3-2 – 5-4 – 5 –

7- أستخدمت شبكات التواصل الاجتماعية شعرت بأن قدراتي على إحترام الرأي الآخر قد تطورت كثيراً .

محايد الرأي

8 بسبب استخدامي للشبكات التواصل الاجتماعية أصبح لديّ ..... من الأصدقاء غير السعوديين .

0 - 1-3 6-4 9-7 10

9- خلال الشهرين الماضيين, عدد مشاركاتي المتعلقة بمجتمعات أخرى غير المجتمع السعودي في موقع الشبكات الاجتماعية الـ(YouTube , blogs ,twitter , Facebook هي:

0 - 1-5 6-10 11-15 15 .

10- واصلني مع أفراد عائلتي عبر شبكات التواصل الاجتماعية, لم أعد بحاجة إلى حضور الزيارة الأسبوعية التقليدية.

محايد الرأي

## محاييد الرأي

12- عندما أريد التحدث مع أحد والديّ لأمر ما ،غالباً :

أتحدث معهم بشكل مباشر أستعين بقريب أستخدم شبكات التواصل الاجتماعية هاتفية أتصل بهم من خلال الهاتف .

13- أفضل الحصول على نصائح من أصدقائي في شبكات التواصل الاجتماعية أكثر من الحصول عليها

## محاييد الرأي

14- نظراً لإستخدامي لشبكات التواصل الاجتماعية أصبح لديّ الثقة في أن أ  
على أن أكون تابع يتخذ له القرارات ممن هم أكبر مني سنناً على سبيل المثال ( والديّ أو أخي الكبير أو  
(

## محاييد الرأي

15- جتماعية خلق فجوة بيني و بين مجتمعي في ما يخص العادات و التقاليد

## محاييد الرأي

16- منذ أن إستخدمت شبكات التواصل الاجتماعية أصبحت أفرق بين ما هو محرم إجتماعياً و ما هو  
محرم دينياً.

## محاييد الرأي

17- إستخدامي لشبكات التواصل الاجتماعية أثر على وجهة نظري للقضايا المحلية الاجتماعية

## محاييد الرأي

18- اعية أصبحت النساء في مجتمعي أكثر اطلاعاً على حقوقهن في الإسلام  
والتي هي غير مقبولة إجتماعياً.مثلاً ( حق الترشيح و الانتخاب , قيادة المرأة للسيارات....إلى إلخ).

## محاييد الرأي

19 إستخدامي لشبكات التواصل الاجتماعية جعلني اكثر تقبلاً للتحدث مع الجنس الآخر أكثر من ذي قبل.

## محاييد الرأي

20- بسبب الحدود الاجتماعية في مجتمعي و التي تحد من الحديث بين الجنسين ( الرجل و الـ ),  
أصبحت أستخدم شبكات التواصل الاجتماعية لفعل ذلك.

## محاييد الرأي

21- عند حدوث حدث كبير ومهم في مجتمعي ، أول مصدر أُلجأ إليه للحصول على آخر الأخبار هو

التلفزيون الصحف المحلية التواصل الاجتماعية المنتديات المحلية أخرى يرجى كتابتها.

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